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SHORT SERMONS

ON THE GOSPELS

BY

REV. F. PEPPERT

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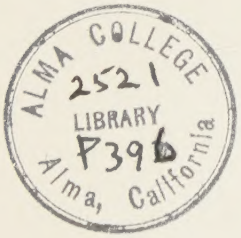

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SHORT SERMONS FOR LOW MASS

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"Lord, save us, we perish."—Matth. viii, 25.

We are sailing, as it were, on the ocean of life, and are perpetually in danger of shipwreck and of failing to secure our Salvation. We ought, therefore, always to be filled with fear, and such fear is beneficial, not injurious to us, whereas false assurance of safety, by making men fancy themselves incapable of falling, often brings about their ruin. If always and everywhere we feel this wholesome fear, and if we distrust our own great weakness, we shall cling with confidence to Him who is able to support us, and we shall ever be mindful of God's holy presence.

Because Jesus was with them, the disciples in their hour of peril cried: "Lord, save us!" We may learn from this short prayer how we too ought frequently to remind ourselves of God's presence. Wherever we are, let us lift up our hearts to God in short but fervent prayers, or ejaculations. This practice is very important, and is in fact inseparable from that of living constantly in the presence of God; for such ejaculatory prayers are glances at Him, and help us to do right and avoid evil. By means of them we are reminded of many virtues, especially at the moment when we are called upon to practise them. They suggest to us now a heartfelt act of faith, now a resolution to trust implicitly in God, and now a feeling of love. In times of temptation we send up a short prayer to beg for strength from God, and it serves to recall to us His Will, and guard us against suggestions of evil, whilst, when we are hesitating between two courses, it is an admonition not to stray

from the path that God would have us follow. If we frequently lift up our hearts to Him thus, our understanding will be enlightened, our perception of what is dangerous and sinful will be quickened, and our will to strip off all earthy weakness and attachments will be strengthened.

If many times in the day we send up to God these little flashes of prayer, we shall really be praying without ceasing, and, as St. John Chrysostom says, we are withdrawing ourselves for a brief space from the company of men, in order to join with the holy angels in praising God. By means of these frequent glances at Him we may to some extent imitate the saints in glory, who always behold Him and praise Him without interruption.

These short prayers have the advantage of being always available. They do not interfere with our work, nor do they check any enjoyment that is pleasing to God; on the contrary, they complete and sanctify everything that we do. They can even take the place of our regular prayers, if for some good reason we cannot devote our usual time to them, and, when in case of illness we are too weak to make long prayers, short ejaculations bring comfort and strength. Happy is the soul that at its last hour departs to God with the words: "Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit"; it seems to be borne aloft on wings of submission and love. Our Saviour, dying on the Cross, set us the best example how to lift up our hearts in words few indeed, but full of ardent love.

What ought we to take as the subject of these short aspirations to be made frequently throughout the day?

A pious man has said with perfect truth that everything heard, seen or perceived supplies us with a subject or motive for such aspirations. If only we were in the habit of referring the things in our daily life to God, any sight, any word heard, any little event

would be enough to fill our minds with thoughts of faith, hope, charity, sorrow for our sins, or joy at God's mercy, goodness and wisdom.

A little ejaculation may often consist of some saying that we have heard, or of a text from Holy Scripture or of a quotation from some pious writer, which we constantly call to mind. In speaking of spiritual reading and of meditation, I pointed out how excellent a plan it was to sum up in a few short words the chief points that we have noticed, and to go back upon these words often in the course of the day. By doing this we are lifting up our hearts to God, a most important and beneficial thing, and it is only thus that any lasting good is derived from reading and meditation. We may very likely forget what we have read and thought, and even our good resolutions are apt to vanish, unless they are constantly renewed. A kind of spiritual motto, however, comes back again and again to our minds, and serves to impress the whole subject more deeply upon our memory, and at the same time it increases the grace of God within us by means of the devotion and good will that we show when we repeat it.

It is not difficult to connect such aspirations with particular times, places or things, so that each of the latter inevitably suggests to us one special pious thought or ejaculation. Good prayerbooks supply us with many instances of such short prayers.

Some may be connected with definite moments in our daily life; thus, on awakening, we may say: "All for love of God!" or "Lord Jesus, in Thy Name I will begin this day," or "If this were to be the last day of my life, should I spend it in sin? Give me, therefore, grace to resist all impulses to anger, envy, etc., and all evil thoughts and inclinations."

On lying down to rest at night: "I lie down not knowing whether

I shall ever wake again. Therefore I put myself in Thy Hands, that Thou mayst protect me in body and in soul."

Particular places may be made to suggest short aspirations. For instance, when we see a church, we may offer a little prayer to Jesus in the most Holy Sacrament of the altar. When we go into any house, we may say: "Peace be to this house and to all that dwell in it." Such thoughts as these would often put us on our guard against frivolous and uncharitable conversation, which is so apt to destroy peace.

Particular things seen may remind us to say a few words of prayer. Why are crosses, statues and pictures of saints put up in our houses and streets unless it be that the sight of them may suggest a pious thought to those who are prone to forget such things amidst the business of life?

The striking of a clock ought to remind us how quickly time flies, and that it behooves us to make good use of it. The tolling of the passing-bell should make even the most thoughtless reflect: "Thou, too, wilt soon appear before thy Judge."

It is true that at first it is somewhat difficult to form the habit of making ejaculatory prayers, and we are so careless and so much distracted by the work, joys and sorrows of our every-day life, that we easily forget them. Yet everything that seems hard at first grows easy by practice, and finally becomes a sort of second nature.

I would gladly see you adopt this practice, but you must beware of praying mechanically, merely from force of habit saying certain words on certain occasions, without thinking about them at all, and without deriving fervor, admonition and comfort from their meaning and from all that they contain. They should not simply be repeated, but they should influence you in your actions. Accustom yourselves frequently to lift up your hearts to God in holy aspira-

tions, and then even if you have no friend at hand to counsel you, you will never lack advice; if you no longer hear words of comfort, you will enjoy the sweetest consolation; and even if everything seems dull, mean and commonplace, you will be truly united to God. You will never perish through thoughtlessness, for Jesus will ever be with you, if only you call upon Him saying: "Lord, save us!" He will guide you safely through all the monotony and all the storms of life. Amen.

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"But while men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat."—Matth. xiii, 25.

The enemy, who came to sow cockle whilst the men were asleep, reminds us of another of our Lord's sayings: "Watch ye and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matth. xxvi, 41).

Vigilance and prayer are the best means of resisting the enemy when he comes to tempt us; it behooves us especially to be on our guard against him.

In what frame of mind ought we to await the coming of temptation? In order that our foe may not assail us unawares, we must always remember that, as long as we live, we shall never be free from temptation. We are reminded of this in Holy Scripture, where we read: "Son, when thou comest to the service of God . . . prepare thy soul for temptation" (Eccl. ii, 1). All who have ever seriously resolved to serve God, have been subject to many grievous temptations, as we see from the lives of the saints. St. John Chrysostom says: "Of those who have been dearest and most pleasing to God, there never was one without grievous temptations, although it might appear to us that this was not the case."

For this reason we ought not to lose courage when we are tempted, nor fancy that God has forsaken us; on the contrary, temptations are a proof of His love, as He wishes to secure our salvation by means of them.

It is only when we are tempted that we can show plainly that we love God and goodness more than anything else. As Blosius says: "A pilot is seen to advantage when directing a ship, a hero on the

field of battle, a brave man in adversity, and Christian virtue in time of temptation." Trees send their roots more deeply into the earth, the more they are shaken by storms, and, in the same way, virtue is made perfect in weakness. Our own weakness becomes very plain to us when we are tempted, and our recognition of it makes us humble, and leads us to distrust ourselves and trust solely in God. Humility lies at the root of all virtue, and whatever intensifies it, strengthens our spiritual life. Just as a seaman loads his ship with heavy balast to keep it steady and prevent it from being dashed against the rocks by the waves, so God sends us temptations to steady us and keep us down, so that we may not be puffed up by any good qualities that we happen to possess, and so come to ruin.

St. Gregory Nazianzen remarks that God orders things in a wonderful way for us to be frequently tormented by temptations, since man might imagine himself strong in his own strength, unless in the depths of his heart he were conscious of his weakness. When temptation falls upon him, and he is tortured and, as it seems, excessively exhausted by it, he sees that humility is the only protection against it, and so the very thing that made him fear to fall causes him to begin to stand firm.

Temptation forces us to cling to God, and to have recourse to Him with confidence, knowing that He loves us. If we use it aright, it leads us to love Him more.

It increases also our charity toward our neighbor. Those who have not learned by personal experience of temptation how great human weakness is, are apt to judge others too harshly and mercilessly. In spite of all his goodness and piety, a man who had never been tempted could not use due leniency and charity in judging his neighbor, and his severity and sternness, far from assisting the tempted and sinful, and bringing them back to God, would only

plunge them yet deeper into sin. This is beautifully expressed in Holy Scripture in the words: "What doth he know that hath not been tried?" (Eccl. xxxiv, 9).

It is only when we ourselves suffer temptation that we can advise and help others, partly that they may avoid what might imperil their Salvation, and partly that they may have recourse to the best means of overcoming their temptations.

We must not lose courage when we are tried, but fight bravely, and in this way alone we shall obtain the wisdom and strength necessary to enable us to be of service to others and help them to work out their Salvation.

Finally we ought not to forget that our struggles to resist temptation win for us a rich supply of merit. As St. Paul says: "He that striveth for the mastery, is not crowned except he strive lawfully" (II. Tim. ii, 5). The crown of everlasting life is composed of the merit won by resisting and overcoming temptation.

St. Ambrose gives us most encouraging advice, when he tells us not to fear temptations, but to rejoice in them and say: "If we are tempted, we are mighty, for then crowns of righteousness are being woven for us as conquerors." When you are tried, remember that your eternal reward is being prepared for you.

It is indispensable to our salvation that we should be tempted—in what frame of mind ought we therefore to await temptation? The answer can easily be supplied from what I have already said. It would be reckless folly to go out of one's way to look for temptations, but, on the other hand, if it assails us, it would be silly and harmful to lose courage and to fancy that God had forsaken us.

In times of trial let us remember St. John Chrysostom's words, for he tells us that temptation is good evidence of God's care for us. When it is present, God is not far away. Hence when it comes

upon you, acknowledge calmly and without disturbance of mind your own weakness; look at the depths to which you might fall, if you were not upheld by God's almighty Hand; humble yourself before God in your heart, but at the same time call upon Him with childlike confidence to help you, and rely upon Him, trusting absolutely in Him. He is the Protector of all who trust in Him, and we need fear no defeat, as long as He is on our side. No matter how great or how violent a temptation may be, we can, like St. Paul, be sure that He "will make also with temptation issue, that we may be able to bear it" (I. Cor. x, 13).

Let us be firmly convinced that the devil has power over us only to the extent permitted by God, in order that we may be tried for our good.

Humble, but unwavering confidence in God, is the disposition with which we may fearlessly encounter temptation.

Let us always be ready to exclaim: "If I trust in the Lord, I shall not be overthrown. Even if armies in camp should stand together against me, my heart shall not fear; if a battle should rise up against me, in Him will I be confident" (Ps. xxvi, 3).

Nothing but true confidence in God can give us the courage necessary in our struggle against temptation, and this confidence we should awaken daily and hourly in our hearts.

No matter how often and how much we are tempted, let us never doubt God's willingness to help us. We have only to lift up our hearts to Him in childlike trust, and we shall be saved, and thus each time of temptation will be not a snare for our destruction, but one of those glorious moments when the crown of life everlasting is being prepared for us. Amen.

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed."—Matth. xiii. 31.

The parable of the grain of mustard seed should remind us of a virtue to which the kingdom of God on earth owes, in a very special manner, its growth and its solidity—the virtue of humility.

Humility removes all obstacles to the grace which will be our support in the warfare of life, for "God resisteth the proud." Many have fallen into sin simply because they thought themselves too strong to yield to it. Pride leads us to forget God, to despise the experience of others, and, even if we have sorrowful experiences of our own, it makes us fancy that we are now much stronger and wiser than we used to be, and, therefore, we shall now have no difficulty at all in overcoming a temptation that conquered us before, it is true, yet not without a struggle. Pride is literally a revolt against God, and a voluntary yielding to evil, a surrender of ourselves to temptation and sin.

Pride leads us to judge harshly of sinners, to ridicule and despise them, and to make their faults our favorite topic of conversation: in this way we are indulging our vanity, by assuming ourselves to be far better than poor, weak creatures, such as they are.

God allows the proud to learn by bitter experience to ask themselves: "Who art thou that judgest another?" He withdraws His hand from them and lets them fall as deep, or even deeper, than their fellows whom they have been accustomed to regard with scornful disdain. Well is it for such proud men if, after their fall, they understand the words: "Who art thou that judgest another?"—thou art poor, weak and wretched, just as those were whom thou

wast wont to despise and condemn without mercy—thou art even poorer, weaker and more wretched than they.

Well is it, indeed, for the proud if they recognize this truth at least after they have fallen into sin; but pride often blinds them to such an extent, that what they condemn unmercifully in others, appears no sin at all in themselves, and they find a thousand excuses for doing things that they have ridiculed and scorned when done by others. When this is the case, they continue in their sins, and fall again and again into fresh temptations, until they are finally so completely entangled in evil, that they cannot escape from it without a special miracle of God's grace.

"God resisteth the proud and giveth grace unto the humble," therefore, if you wish to triumph over all temptations now and always, you must suffer humility to reign in your hearts. Do not be misled by the fact that the humble man is often looked down upon by his fellow-creatures—he is truly great in God's sight; and true greatness comes from God alone, no human being is able to bestow it. Men often try to poison our minds by flattering our vanity and by extolling the good qualities that they believe us to possess, and thus they lead us to despise the faithful warnings of our true friends, and to cherish exaggerated ideas of our own importance. Such flatterers aim at persuading us that wisdom consists in disregarding the laws of God, beauty in offending against decency, and genuine self-respect in giving way to erroneous opinions and evil passions. How can such people give us comfort, counsel and help—even if they wish to do so, when sin has plunged us into misery?

Would that you always recognized clearly and humbly what life really is! At each step experience would then confirm the truth of what I say, in my desire to be a faithful counsellor. Those who poison our hearts with pride are the very first to crush us, when

we are brought low, with their scorn, indifference, contempt and condemnation. This is a just curse upon the proud, which will weigh him down to the end of the world. Whoever is abandoned by God is finally brought low and is forsaken by men; for he who rejects God, his best friend, will never find a true and loyal friend among men.

Before it is too late inscribe upon your hearts the words: "To the humble God giveth grace" (I. Peter v, 5); none but a humble soul can overcome the temptations of life, and none other is strong, for it is only for the humble that God Himself fights. If you have not humility, no matter what means you employ against temptation, all will be in vain. Even prayer avails but little without humility, as without it, it is not true prayer at all, although the prayer of a child-like and humble soul, offered with loving confidence, is a most powerful protection when we are tempted. Our Lord says: "Ask and you shall receive" (John xvi, 24), and His words can never prove false.

Even if the waves of temptation threaten to overwhelm us, we will have recourse to Him, and He never is asleep when we need His help. St. Cyprian says very beautifully: "Just as children run to their mother when something has frightened them, so let us turn for shelter to God, when we are alarmed by any temptation."

Therefore lift up your hearts to God with some holy thought as soon as each temptation assails you. Prayer places our hearts, as it were, in God's hand, and there even in the midst of trials, we enjoy the peace of childlike confidence in Him. The temptation does not necessarily cease as soon as we pray, but our fear lest we should be unable to overcome it is soothed.

More than by any other false suggestions are we misled by the idea that it is impossible for us to prevail over our temptations, but

this thought vanishes and gives place to courage and confidence as soon as we pray. Prayer strengthens us so that we attain to fortitude, the third virtue necessary in every struggle with temptation, and fortitude, as a Christian virtue, takes away all diffidence as to whether we can conquer even with God's help, and impels us to have recourse to the right means of gaining the victory, even if they may seem painful, for we are upheld by a holy consciousness of our strength in God.

It is a universal truth that he is lost who gives himself up for lost, but it is particularly true in our conflict with temptation. He is indeed lost who yields to panic, and is not resolved to fight with firm confidence in God.

Let us, therefore, seek protection in humble, trustful prayer, and then every temptation will become to us a means of salvation, an opportunity for earning merit and a step on the way to heaven.

We ought to struggle thus against all temptations, including those to venial sin, for they are often most dangerous to our spiritual life. St. Francis of Sales says: "A generous nature is less prone to fall into gross sins, and it is easy to avoid murder, robbery and bearing false witness, but the smaller temptations to anger, envy, jealousy, falsehood and misrepresentation are those which insinuate themselves into the hearts even of good people and gradually try to bring about their destruction."

May the virtue of humility, united in your hearts with trustful prayer, ever gain strength and grow, like the grain of mustard seed, to a vigorous plant, able to afford you protection and refreshment in your fierce encounters with temptation. Amen.

TWENTY-EIGHTH AND LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty."—Matth. xxiv, 30.

The Church's year ends with the gospel containing an account of the Last Judgment, and reminds us of our end, which must be either happy or miserable. Nothing is better calculated to make us lead good and God-fearing lives than the thought of the judgment that awaits us. This thought has caused multitudes to refrain from evil and has encouraged them to do good, and has made a great impression, not only upon individuals, but upon whole nations.

At the command of Bogoris, a Bulgarian prince, St. Methodius painted a picture representing the Last Judgment, in which our Lord was depicted, appearing in infinite majesty and justice, and all mankind gathered around Him, the righteous at His right hand, and the wicked at His left. Horror and fear were displayed by the expression of the latter, whereas the faces of the former were radiant with joy and glory. This painting produced an indescribable effect. Bogoris asked for baptism, and many others followed his example. If the thought of judgment made such a deep impression upon this ignorant man, how much deeper should be its effect upon us, who know what our Lord taught, and therefore have far greater reason to fear the punishment that we shall deserve, if by our sins we reject Jesus Christ!

We ought to make it our practice to meditate upon the last judgment, and to renew and adhere to the resolutions that we make when we thus meditate.

On that day every one will stand revealed to himself and to the whole world, and will see himself in all his sinfulness and abomina-

tion. Now many deceive themselves, find nothing bad in their characters, and even imagine that they possess certain virtues. Now many live carelessly and flatter themselves that they are quite good enough; but the less we know our own hearts, and the more careless we are in doing our duty and in examining our conscience now, the more painful will be the revelation of ourselves that we shall receive on the last day. But, on the other hand, the more zealous we are now in finding out the truth about ourselves, and the more sinful we appear in our own eyes, the easier will be the task of amendment, and we shall have less reason to dread this terrible revelation. On the last day every sin will be laid bare before the whole world; and this thought should spur us on to do good in secret now, that we may not then be put to shame. We are much afraid of being humiliated before one human being, but on that day we shall stand defenceless and naked, not before one or two people, but before all who have ever lived. We shall stand ashamed before all who have loved and counselled us in this life, who have always thought well of us, and will then perceive how greatly they have been mistaken in their opinion. We shall stand ashamed before those who have admonished and instructed us, whose admonitions and teaching we have disregarded, giving them only disobedience and indifference in return. Unhappy, indeed, will he be who by his sins has set a bad example to others, leading them astray; he will stand there accused by those to whom he has been a stumbling-block, and cursed by those, who, with him, are condemned to everlasting punishment.

How will a sinner dare to raise his eyes, when he sees on our Lord's right hand the multitude of those who have led a good life on earth? He has often deceived himself with the thought that it is impossible to be good—he may even have gone so far as to

call the good hypocritical. Now he sees many who have served the Lord with heroic courage, that is in itself a condemnation of his own pride; he sees many who have lived in willing obedience, and their example rebukes his disobedience; he sees many who have kept their hearts pure and undefiled in God's sight, and they force him to recognize his own foulness and sin; he sees many who have done true penance and who, steadfastly purposing amendment, have risen from a life of sin to a high degree of perfection, and thus condemn him for his unwillingness to repent. The sinner may well be overwhelmed with fear and confusion on beholding all these witnesses of his trial. He will exclaim: "Would that I had been wiser and had led a better life!"

If you keep that moment vividly in remembrance, you may be sure of finding courage to overcome self and to strive after what is good, so that Jesus may not have to give sentence against you on the last day, but may be able to reward you.

We shall be judged before all mankind by a Judge who knows all things, and from whom the inmost secrets of our hearts are not concealed. Watch, therefore, over yourselves, that Jesus may find in you nothing to incur His wrath for ever; for He will examine us strictly. He will survey all our voluntary thoughts and desires, all our voluntary wishes and fancies. Therefore never imagine that a mere thought is a matter of no consequence, for a thought, as far as it is voluntary, can offend God, who sees it as plainly as men can see our actions.

Suppress at once all evil thoughts, reject all bad desires, and let good thoughts and wishes drive out and take the place of those that are offensive to God. Call to mind often the fact that God is present, and knows all things, and make your hearts His temples by frequently renewing your good intention of thinking and wishing

only *what* God desires and *because* He desires it. If you have strayed from Him by sins of thought, purify your minds by an act of contrition, and resolve to make atonement and keep your hearts pure and pleasing to Him.

Beware of yielding to bad thoughts and desires; the more careful you are to keep your hearts pure, the more certain will you be to make progress in virtue, and with the greater confidence will you appear at last before the judgment-seat of Christ.

Jesus, who knows all things, will judge us strictly with reference to all our sins of omission, all that we had it in our power to do, and did not. Our shame and punishment will be proportionate to the opportunities we have had, and to the training that we received in childhood. The time of youth should be utilized in training the mind and heart. As God gave you opportunities in youth of learning to know His Holy Will, He will demand more of you than of others.

By means of prayer and a virtuous life strive to grow in true piety, for if you acquire strength of character when you are young, you will be able later on to stand firm in the faith and to live righteously. If, however, you allow yourselves to be misled by the world and its false principles, if you are not true to the teaching that you received in your early years, you will deserve a far harsher sentence on the day of judgment than many others, who now live recklessly and thoughtlessly, caring nothing for God or for virtue, simply because they have never been taught any better, and because, when they were young, they were led astray and followed a path that turned away from God.

We shall one day be called upon to give an account of every grace received from God. How often has He spoken to our hearts and shed His light within them! We feel impelled by grace to do this or that good action, but concupiscence is not dead in us, and our

indifference stands in the way of God's grace; but whenever you are conscious of the struggle between them, think of the day when our Lord will ask what use has been made of that grace, and of that inward prompting which you perhaps neglected or even despised.

God speaks to us also outwardly in Holy Scripture, which is made known to us at school, at church and in the confessional, through the instructions of those appointed to teach us. If we refuse to hear His word, we incur the greater guilt, the more often and the more lovingly He speaks. When He asks: "Why did you do this or that?" we shall find no excuse to make, but shall have to confess: "Lord, we knew Thy Commandments and understood them, but we did not obey them. Although we did not deserve it, Thou hast often warned us, but we disregarded Thy warnings."

Remember that one day our Lord will call us to give a strict account of every admonition that we have ever received, and renew your resolution to open your hearts to God's Holy Word and to all pious instruction, gladly and willingly to do as you are taught, not trusting to your own self-will which is apt to rebel against all exhortations to do what is right, but submitting to God's holy will. Resolve, too, not to be carried away by any fancy that may occur to you, since such things lead only to destruction, though they may seem most attractive.

Let us now, at the end of the ecclesiastical year, beg God to be our aid as long as life lasts; let us be unwearied in trying to advance on the way of perfection, in purifying our hearts from evil and in keeping Jesus and His Holy Commandments before our eyes. Let us look up to Him always with clean hearts, and then we need not dread His coming at the last day. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

"When you shall see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is at hand."—Luke xxi, 31.

Our Lord enumerated the events which are to precede the last judgment, in order that men may then at least have recourse to Penance; but, as far as we are concerned, the prediction of the events is equivalent to their occurrence. It is certain that sooner or later the terrible judgment will take place, and we ought therefore often seriously to think about it, and this reflection will lead us to give up our sins and will encourage us to strive earnestly to acquire fresh virtues. As the Wise Man says: "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin" (Eccl. vii, 40).

By giving us so solemn and so important a subject for meditation as that contained in to-day's Gospel, our Lord shows how good and expedient it is for us to meditate upon all the truths of religion, as this tends to our edification and ultimately to our Salvation. Thinking over these truths is a form of prayer in the wider sense of the word, and is much recommended by all teachers of the spiritual life, who call it meditation. It behoves every Christian to know at least something about it, and so we will consider to-day first the advantages of meditation, and then the right way to make it.

By making a meditation we mean penetrating into some truth for our edification, and not merely in order to become acquainted with it or to obtain a better comprehension of it. If we, therefore, think over the truths of our religion simply with a view to learning them and to understanding them more fully, we are not making the sort of meditation of which we are now speaking.

When we meditate, we try to penetrate more deeply into one of

the truths of our holy religion, so as to awaken in our hearts pious feelings and affections, holy resolutions and a firm intention to be zealous in acquiring virtues. Thinking over things in order to know them enlightens the mind, but pious meditation warms the heart, and urges it on to pursue what is right. Even if Holy Scripture and the great writers of the Church taught us nothing regarding the importance of frequently making pious meditations, we could find it out for ourselves. Any one who aims at achieving a task that demands great exertion and costly sacrifices, would be discouraged by the difficulty of his undertaking, unless he often renewed his purpose by thinking of his goal; but he would often not know how to reach this goal, unless he studied the means of doing so, and, by thinking of the suitability of the means, derived fresh energy to apply them, in order thus to attain to the desired end. Thus serious meditation leads to an intense wish to reach the goal, and our one great goal is heaven.

Why has holy Church to mourn over many who do not lead Christian lives? Chiefly because so many have not the faith. Yet the great majority of Christians, although they do not live as they ought, have the faith and adhere to its truths, but never think about them. And just because they never let their minds dwell upon these truths, they are unaffected by them, their hearts remain cold, and in spite of having the true faith, they live carelessly and act as if they had it not.

To such we may apply the words of the prophet Jeremias: "With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart" (Jer. xii, 11). Such hearts are devoid of virtue and devastated by sin, because they never consider the truths of faith that they know. God's word is planted in them like seed in the earth, but it never grows, and it bears no fruit, because it

is not quickened into life by the warmth derived from meditation. What more terrible doctrine can there be than that concerning hell? Yet there are some who firmly believe it, but never think about it, never consider what everlasting punishment means, and so are unaffected by the warnings that it impresses upon us. Such people live as if they did not believe in hell; they will even live as if hell did not exist at all.

The faith of such Christians is like a flint, from which sparks of fire can be produced only by repeated blows with the steel; otherwise there is no sign of fire about it.

If only those who have the faith would frequently consider the various truths of our holy religion thoughtfully and with earnest piety, they would be led to make many good resolutions and to amend their way of life.

We may, therefore, know and believe the truths of religion, but, unless we think about them, we are only too likely to fall into a careless way of life and into the sins of the world. The man who meditates upon these truths is alone steadfast in his efforts to attain to eternal happiness.

We read in Holy Scripture that the man is blessed who meditates day and night on the law of the Lord (Ps. i, 1, 2), for the resolutions formed during meditation will not vanish and leave no trace, but they will remain with him day and night, and direct him in all that he thinks, does and avoids. Thus frequent meditation becomes really a remembrance of the law of the Lord by day and by night. In another passage of Holy Scripture we read: "Blessed is the man that shall continue in wisdom, and that shall meditate in his justice, and in his mind shall think of the all-seeing eye of God" (Eccl. xiv, 22).

In accordance with the teaching of Holy Scripture, the Fathers of

the Church lose no opportunity of urging men to meditate upon her doctrines. St. Jerome bids us withdraw often into holy, silent meditation, as into a quiet haven from the stormy sea of life, and he concludes his admonition with these words: "I give you this advice, not in order to cut you off from your family (as if you ought to forget them and spend your time in meditation upon sacred things), but, on the contrary, you ought to meditate, in order to learn thereby how to behave towards others."

St. Augustine recommends meditation as a safeguard against sin, and says very truly that it is impossible for one, who has holy thoughts in his heart, to do evil deeds, impossible, that is to say, for one whose heart is really filled and penetrated with holy thoughts that are the outcome of his meditation.

St. Bernard speaks of the excellent effects of meditation, and says: "It purifies first the source whence it proceeds, viz. the intellect, which begins the meditation, and then it gives a right intention to all our duties, directs our actions, corrects our faults, and orders our manners and our whole life; finally it procures for us a knowledge of all the things of God."

Meditation is most profitable not only to those who desire to continue free from sin, but also, and in a higher degree, to those who wish to make progress in real piety and virtue. It completes our knowledge of the doctrines of our holy religion, it renders our faith more lively, it adds strength to our hope, and warmth and fervor to our love of God.

At first it may not be easy to meditate, but much of the difficulty is overcome by means of spiritual reading. Whoever has not learned how to make a meditation, may begin by reading a short passage in some good book, and then thinking over what he has read; afterwards he may read on further, and stop again to impress the subject

well upon his memory, making such good resolutions as suggest themselves, and bearing them carefully in mind, in order to put them into practice.

It is very necessary for you to accustom yourselves to some extent to make meditations, if you wish to show others the way to lead a good life and to attain everlasting happiness. By meditating you will learn to do this, not so much by means of dry precepts, as by having your hearts inflamed with real zeal for souls. Therefore pray God to give you grace to acquire the habit of making meditations, for thus you will not merely learn the truths of religion, but, realizing their beauty in the depths of your hearts, you will burn with an ardent desire to lead others too to know the infinite beauty of God. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

"Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me."—Matth. xi, 6.

By referring to His works, our Lord wished to prove that He was the promised Messias, the One who should come, and whom all the saints of the Old Testament had ardently longed to behold. For our sake He made known by word and deed His Divine mission to all the world, and it is our duty, too, by word and deed, to proclaim our faith in Him fearlessly for love of Him. This is the lesson contained in the words, "Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me," that is to say, "he only is blessed and attains to eternal bliss who believes firmly in Me, and does not allow any worldly arguments to make him waver in his faith. He only attains to eternal bliss who never denies Me in word or action, but acknowledges My doctrines in speech and by his daily life."

The history of the Apostles and of the early Christians, and, in fact, the whole history of Christianity down to the present day is full of glorious instances of the most fearless confession of Christ. After the Apostles had undergone untold hardships whilst preaching the Gospel in distant lands, they suffered martyrdom in shameful and painful ways; and the Christians of the first three centuries likewise were in constant danger of death if they steadfastly acknowledged Christ. Nevertheless, they clung firmly to the truth, knowing that they ought to fear God rather than man.

Catholics in every age have followed their example. The Church has always been assailed by her enemies, and those who confess the Catholic faith have been liable to persecution. If we read the

history of the missions in America, Africa, China and elsewhere, we shall find hundreds of instances of inviolable loyalty to Christ on the part of devoted missionaries and their converts, who suffered death in its most agonizing form rather than deny Him. If we turn our eyes to civilized Europe, we shall see that at no distant date Catholics had to shed their blood and suffer the loss of all their inherited and acquired possessions and of all their civil rights for the sake of their faith. This was the case in England, where Queen Elizabeth and King James I requited the devoted loyalty of their Catholic subjects by cruel oppression and the shedding of much innocent blood. Even where confession of the Catholic faith has not involved physical suffering, it was, and is at the present time made difficult by those in authority, who, being blinded by pride, try to throw ridicule upon religion and virtue; the writings of such men are regarded as masterpieces of the human intellect, and thus the faith of multitudes is undermined, and even many, who are nominally Catholics, delight in mocking at their religion and in despising those who follow its teachings. St. Paul's words: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II. Tim. iii, 12), are still true, and we all ought to remember that our Lord said: "He that shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His majesty and that of His Father, and of the holy angels" (Luke ix, 26). He still says to us all: "Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me."

It is easy enough, when we are quietly making a meditation, to think it quite impossible for us ever to be more afraid of offending men than God; but when we go out into the world and hear sarcastic, sneering and contemptuous remarks addressed to us; when apparently good reasons are given for representing our most sacred

convictions as foolish, and our education as not up to date; when our steadfast loyalty to Christ brings us into danger of forfeiting the esteem of a man whom, for some reason or other, we desire to please—then the struggle becomes difficult and we risk denying our faith in Christ, or at least some principles of that faith, through human respect. We are in peril of being disloyal to our Lord not merely in word, but also in our hearts if, under the influence of human respect, we fail to accomplish the good that is in accordance with God's will, and do the evil that men desire.

Hence it is very necessary for us to try to strengthen ourselves by making good resolutions very often to avoid the sin of fear of man, to which Christians are only too apt to yield. Fear of man is an unworthy sentiment, which prevents us from following the prompting of our conscience, and constrains us to do evil and neglect our duty through a cowardly reluctance to displease others, or with a shameful intention of currying favor with them. It is a despicable and sinful kind of servility that withdraws a man from the service of God and subjects him to the will of his fellow creatures in order to win their esteem and to avoid their disapproval.

Fear of man is utterly mean, for he who yields to it disregards God's voice and listens only to the deceitful arguments of wicked men. He becomes the slave of all whom he fears to offend, and his opinions, words and actions are not guided by his own reason and the voice of his own conscience, but by the views of men who are mistaken, if not actually malicious. He thinks, speaks and judges, not in accordance with his own knowledge, but because others, with whom he cannot at heart agree, think, speak and judge in a particular way.

He knows what is right, but instead of making use of his free will and choosing to do his duty, he has no courage, simply because

he fears to be criticized by men whose blame would often be true praise. He knows that he is doing wrong and abhors it in his inmost heart, and yet he does it, fearing to incur the unjust scorn of wicked men. He recognizes his duty, and sees how great and noble a thing it would be to act according to it; but yet he fails to do so, because others, too, fail to act as they ought. Fear of man causes us often to be false to our own reason, conscience and free will. A Christian, who wishes to be regarded by the world as highly educated and as possessing an enlightened and untrammelled mind, is very apt to fall into this sin, which utterly degrades him, since human dignity requires us to use our free will in following the dictates of reason and conscience.

Many other sins degrade man to the level of a beast, but fear of man makes us resemble those heathen idols of which we read in Holy Scripture that "They have eyes, and see not; they have ears, and hear not." In the same way people who through fear of man do not venture to confess Christ and to follow His teaching, have eyes, tongues and ears, but refrain from using them for their own good. They have tongues, but they are afraid to quote the words of Him who is Truth in opposition to wicked and Godless remarks; they have ears, but they dare not listen to the voice of conscience, and seem unaware that the principles of those whom they fear are bad; they have eyes, the eyes of the mind, and see that they are being misled by those about them, yet they follow the wrong path blindly.

Such people are made like the idols of the heathen by their fear of men, and they share the same fate. The idols are for a time treated with reverence and honored with incense, but in the end they are neglected and forgotten, and, in the same way, Christians, who through human respect have been disloyal to Christ, are per-

haps for a time praised and honored, but at last they are abandoned by those for whose sake they acted contrary to the dictates of reason and conscience, and see themselves mocked and despised.

What do they gain by their human respect? A little fleeting favor from their fellow men, and God's eternal displeasure, for, as we read in Holy Scripture, "He that feareth man shall quickly fall" (Prov. xxix, 25), he shall perish in his sins.

Fear of man is really the most injurious thing that we have to fear. No form of persecution, no insults or ridicule can do the Church so much harm. Persecution can torture and slay the body, but it cannot touch the soul; insults and ridicule can, indeed, cause us much pain and give us days of bitter suffering, but these will have an end; whereas, fear of man kills the soul and brings down everlasting punishment upon it. If only all Christians would keep free from this fear, the enemies of Holy Church could only benefit her by all their attempts to ruin her, since such attempts would be opportunities for Christians boldly to confess their faith, and thus would only promote her glory. Fear of man hinders them from confessing their faith and doing their duty, and exposes the Church to shameful outrage at the hands of her enemies, harming her in this way more than any persecution or contempt could do. Therefore when we read in history of the terrible persecutions against the Church, we ought to be encouraged to resist fear of man. If, in spite of our convictions, we are false to her, we shall be more guilty than the persecutors, who may not have understood her claims. The disobedience of her own children can inflict worse wounds than any enemies.

Keep therefore the teaching of our holy religion before your eyes and listen to the voice of conscience, doing always what it commands. Never hesitate to do right through fear of what people

may say; and should this foolish alarm stand in the way of your acting and speaking as you ought, remember St. Paul's words: "To me it is a very small thing to be judged by you . . . but He that judgeth me is the Lord" (I. Cor. vi, 3, 4). Ask yourselves, therefore: "What does God require of me? What will He say of me on the day of judgment if I do this or that?" I will do what pleases Him, caring nothing for the praise or blame of men, and being anxious only to confess the Lord Jesus before the whole world and throughout my whole life, that He, too, may acknowledge Me at the last day and give me the reward promised to those who stand firm in their loyalty to Him: "Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me." Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

"Who art thou?"—John i, 19.

"Who art thou?" The priests and Levites asked St. John this question, and we ought often to address it to our Lord, Who in His Divine nature is love, truth, wisdom and perfection, and in His human nature is our highest example. We ask Him this question especially during meditation, and I propose that we should now consider how such meditation may best be made.

We begin by choosing a subject for it, an episode recorded in the Gospel, or one of the truths of faith, or some point of morality important to us because of our position in life.

Having chosen a subject we place ourselves as vividly as possible in the presence of God, and, because every good gift is from above, we ask with childlike faith for His help to make a pious meditation in conformity with His will. Masters of the spirtual life recommend us also to imagine that we have the subject before our eyes, and that we actually see the events occurring. However, in the case of subjects beyond our apprehension and imagination, such mental pictures might be a hindrance rather than a help. Under no circumstances is it advisable to strain the imagination, and if it is difficult to form a mental picture in connection with certain subjects, we should leave it alone and go on to the meditation, which does us good because we use our understanding and will, not on account of the vividness of our imagination.

Our first business in making a meditation, after choosing a subject, is to think over it carefully and to consider its various aspects,

so as to acquire sufficient insight into it and a true appreciation of its truth. It is important, in order to avoid any distraction of thought and excessive use of the imagination, to divide the subject into various points or headings, and to adhere strictly to them. For instance, if I have chosen the words: "I believe in God the Father" as the subject of my meditation, I may think of God as the Father, infinite in goodness, first, to all creatures, and secondly, to myself. Or I may say: "He is my Father in times of joy as well as of sorrow." Thirdly, He is my Father also when I intercede with Him for all my fellow creatures who need help, etc.

As in everything else, in this most important occupation of the mind it is essential to follow some method. If meditation proves unprofitable, it is generally because we have no definite method of beginning it and of carrying it out.

If, in thinking over one of the truths of faith, we feel ourselves affected by it; if we derive from it thoughts that enlighten, console and raise us: if we discover in it food for our minds, let us dwell upon it, giving free scope to our pious thoughts and feelings, and not minding if, by doing so, we shall have to omit one or other of the points selected for meditation, because our time is limited. Our object is not to meditate upon a certain number of points, but to open our hearts to be enlightened and warmed, and this can often be effected by one single word. If, on the other hand, after thinking for some time about one of our points, we are not roused or stimulated by it, we ought quietly to pass on to the next, not hastily or in a cursory manner, but with due deliberation.

When in meditation we think over certain points, it is not primarily in order to learn some facts about the subject selected, but in order to awaken pious feelings in our hearts. Such feelings and affections ought to be like a purifying fire, stimulating us to

do right, and they are most beneficial to us. Such are, for instance, a true and heartfelt sorrow for sin, fear, confidence, gratitude, love of God, unfeigned love of our neighbor, and any other sentiment called forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who imparts what He sees best to each of us in meditation.

The third and last part of our meditation consists partly of good resolutions, which the feelings and affections aroused in our hearts prompt us to make, and partly of prayers in which we ask forgiveness for our sins and other graces from God. The good resolutions should, as I have often said before, not be too general. It would be too vague, for instance, to resolve in future to be obedient, patient, humble, etc. Such general resolutions are apt to be forgotten in the course of our daily life, and we do not think of applying them in the various cases where we might do so. It is better to form resolutions applicable to the particular circumstances in which we are placed: *e. g.*, we may resolve to be charitable on some special occasion and towards some definite person. In this way we shall more easily overcome the enemy of our souls. The more we prepare ourselves for the temptations that are likely to occur during each day, the better shall we be able to resist them. With reference, however, to the good resolutions that we make in mediation, we ought to be on our guard lest through human frailty we are tempted to sin. It sometimes happens that thinking for a long time about the resolutions which we are forming gives rise to temptations, and, should this occur, it is better to resolve firmly to resist them, without thinking too long on the subject.

For instance, a resolution to be truly charitable in our dealings with some particular person may, if we think too much about it, only cause us to recall former unkindness and wrongs, and hence it is better simply to purpose to act kindly in future, and not allow

long brooding over the matter to reawaken unawares any latent aversion in our hearts.

In making a meditation, therefore, we have first to think about the subject chosen, then to rouse ourselves to pious feelings and affections, thirdly, to make good resolutions and discover motives likely to encourage us to put them into practice, and lastly, we ought to conclude with prayer for help to carry out our good resolutions, turning with confidence to God the Father, to Jesus Christ, our Mediator, to the Holy Ghost, the giver of all grace, to our Lady, and to such of the saints as we particularly revere. Let us be careful to choose out one or another of our good resolutions and call it to mind frequently throughout the day, making it, as it were, the keynote of our conduct until our next meditation.

It is plain, from what has been said, that meditation is not nearly so difficult as many people suppose. A very ordinary person can accomplish it quite well; in fact, everyone is capable of thinking over his temporal affairs and duties, of putting them in order and of making resolutions with regard to them. Why then should we not all be capable of acting in the same way with regard to what concerns our spiritual welfare? Let us often spend at least a short time in meditation, so as to penetrate more deeply into the truths necessary for our salvation, exclaiming with St. Augustine, "O God, may I know Thee, and may I know myself." Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths."—Luke iii, 4.

The words "Prepare ye the way of the Lord" were addressed by St. John to the Jews, but they are addressed also to us. We are called upon to do what we can, in order that Christ may come by grace into our hearts and fill them more and more with it. We ought to do this now, more than at any other season, for Christmas is close at hand, and it behooves us to pray earnestly day by day, surveying our sins and shortcoming and striving to correct them, whilst we think often of God and try with all our might to do His will. If we take pains to offer willing hearts to our Lord, we shall deserve to be cleansed, strengthened and sanctified by His grace at Christmas. Then this great festival will bring us all the benefits that the Church intends, for the festivals of Holy Church are profitable to us only if we prepare our hearts for them by true purposes of amendment, and not if we look forward to them with careless indifference.

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord." Let us remember St. John's admonition before each of the great feasts, and let it remind us to prepare for its celebration by fervent devotion and renewed efforts to lead a virtuous life. There is, however, no season of the year when it is not our duty to prepare our hearts for the Lord. Every day that dawns ought to bid us prepare His way, and bring us nearer to Him, and pour His grace more abundantly into our souls.

As we have already seen, the practice of making pious meditations will help us greatly in our efforts to prepare the way of the Lord.

We considered last week the importance and the manner of making meditations, but there is one point connected with the matter that requires further study. Some one may ask what subjects we ought to select for meditation.

There are innumerable subjects that, if we meditate upon them, will supply us with holy thoughts and will suggest good resolutions, for, as the Psalmist says: "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands" (Ps. xviii, 2). All nature in her wonderful beauty furnishes us with abundant materials for meditation, and our Lord Himself bade us contemplate nature when he said: "Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feedeth them" (Matth. vi, 26). "Consider the lilies how they grow; they labor not, neither do they spin. But I say to you, not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these" (Luke xii, 27). There are other passages, too, in which our Lord refers to the sparrows on the roof, and to the hairs on our head, in order to stimulate our feelings of confidence, gratitude and love of God.

Yet, although Christ Himself referred frequently to nature, natural objects ought not to form the usual basis of our meditation, since the human heart is more influenced by the truths made known to us by divine revelation, and especially by the infinite, incomprehensible love with which God so loved the world as to send His only begotten Son into the world, and give us with Him all salvation, all truth, and all the means of grace, without which it would be impossible for us to reach heaven.

The ordinary subjects of our meditation should be Jesus Christ, His revelation and the gifts of His grace, and we ought, as St. Paul says, to desire to know nothing save Christ crucified. Follow-

ing therefore the holy Apostle's example, let us take as subjects for meditation, not the wonders of nature, but rather the truths belonging to the order of grace. Although nature in her manifold outward manifestations serves to raise our thoughts from things seen to things unseen, she cannot rise above herself, but can only point out the way to God from a distance, and even then she is no infallible guide. Meditating on the beauties and wonders of nature may flatter the imagination, but it does not supply strength and comfort to the heart or encourage it to make good resolutions. Such meditation may suggest beautiful thoughts and sentiments, but it cannot inspire us to perform actions demanding mortification and self-denial. It may give rise to exalted flights of the intellect, but it does not enable a man to bear with patience his lot in life if it is hard and wearisome. Yes, unless we have previously learned how to meditate upon the unchanging truths of divine revelation, mere contemplation of nature can only too easily become an opportunity for indulging the lust of the flesh, the desire of the eyes and the pride of life.

Nature worship led the Pagans of old into idolatry and suggested to them the mad idea that it was possible to serve their gods by means of crimes. Even in our own day the study of nature by a sensual mind, devoid of all higher light, often results in the worship of nature and of self, in unbelief and in the immorality to which unbelief gives rise.

It is impossible, therefore, to say that nature ought to supply us with our chief subjects for meditation; it cannot supply us with any at all, unless they are regarded from a truly Christian point of view.

The mysteries of God's revelation are, above all things, the subjects upon which we ought to meditate with humility of heart.

But they are very numerous—which of them ought we especially to choose?

Some of them are calculated to awaken our hope in God or our fear of Him; others tend to stimulate our gratitude and love. To the first class belong the solemn truths regarding death, judgment and hell, and, when we meditate upon them, we are deeply moved and impelled to despise the things of earth and to set our desires upon those of eternity. To the second class belong the mysteries concerning the life and Passion of Christ, and God's infinite perfections, for we cannot contemplate His majesty, goodness, wisdom, etc., without feeling love, thankfulness, joy and admiration. Finally, there are other meditations also belonging to the order of grace, in which we base our reflections upon the acts, the self-surrender, the victories and triumphs of some particular saints. Above all, one of our favorite subjects should be the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a life containing many examples for us all of purity, humility and obedience, and full of faith and confidence in God and of love.

For all Christians, with no distinction of age or position, the best of all subjects for meditation are those connected with our Lord's Passion. He displayed as in a mirror all the virtues pleasing to God and truly heroic, and from Him we derive consolation in all the circumstances of life and strength to enable us to do right. The Cross of Christ was the book constantly studied by the saints, from which they learned the way to heaven. They never were weary of regarding themselves in this mirror of souls. Let us form the habit of saying to ourselves on every occasion: "This is how Jesus behaved; this is how He spoke, judged and acted; such were His dispositions in circumstances resembling my own. Thus would He think, speak and act, were He in my position."

If we keep the eyes of our mind fixed constantly on Him, our great and holy Example, we shall see plainly enough how we may best prepare the way of the Lord, and which path will lead us to heaven. May He guide us on our road, and may we follow Him faithfully. Amen.

THE SUNDAY AFTER THE CIRCUMCISION

"He shall be called a Nazarite."—Matt. ii, 23.

Three days' journey from Jerusalem, at the foot of a mountain, lies the little town of Nazareth, dear to every Christian heart. It was here that the archangel greeted Mary and the greatest miracle of Divine love was wrought, the miracle that we honor daily with the words of St. John: "The Word was made Flesh." After Herod's death, faithful St. Joseph directed his steps hither, bringing the Blessed Virgin and the Divine Child, entrusted by God to his care, back to his poor dwelling, where he led with them a life of poverty indeed, but of a poverty far surpassing in happiness all the riches of the world; for surely happiness must have prevailed in that humble house, where God Himself had taken up His abode.

The little town, which was our Lord's dwelling place in His childhood, was immortalized by the fact that He was known by its name, and in a lesser degree we may say of it what is still more true of the Cross. The Cross, the mark of the deepest shame, was sanctified by Jesus, and in the same way He made the name of Nazarene honorable and holy. All Galileans were despised by the Jews, but the inhabitants of Nazareth were considered more despicable than any others, and to call a man a Nazarene was an insult. Yet the early Christians often gave themselves this name, for it expressed to them the fact that our highest glory is to be found in the deepest humility. Jesus desired to be called a Nazarene, it was His will to be despised, and for our sake he descended into the lowest depths of humiliation,

but while He seems to be scorned by men, He is revealing Himself to us in all the glory of His incomprehensible humility, for He stooped thus low in order to raise us to the dignity of being God's children. Therefore, it ought to be our delight to humble ourselves for love of Him.

When, therefore, the Jews intended to insult our Lord by calling Him a Nazarene, they were really, without knowing it, proclaiming His majesty and love, and honoring Him. The same is the case with those who ridicule Christ and His Church, and flatter themselves that they are doing right and are amusing. The foolish speeches which such people utter only serve to reveal more clearly the glory of Christianity, which they assail with their paltry, conceited words.

It is a remarkable result of the perversity produced by sin in the human heart, that a man is far more apt to be ashamed of what is good than of what is bad, of justice and truth rather than of injustice and falsehood. Hence the foolish language, to which I have referred, may easily tempt us to be ashamed of Christ, or at least to behave as if we did not care much for His doctrines or the commandments of His Church, etc.

We are afraid of boldly contradicting false statements and confessing our faith, lest we should be regarded as wanting in intellect or uneducated.

In short, figuratively, if not literally, we shrink from being called Nazarenes. Let us banish such fear of men from our hearts by thinking that our Divine Lord was willing to have the contemptuous name of Nazarene given also to Him.

How can we be His followers, if we always want to receive praise and applause even from those who are in error and who have no faith at all? If those who do not respect Christ, scorn

and despise us; if they ridicule us because we love Him, let us regard it as an honor to be called Nazarenes, as He was. Let us not be satisfied merely to bear the name, but let us follow His example and be indeed also true Nazarenes.

Apart from its connection with the name of Nazareth, the word Nazarite is used in a sense derived from the Hebrew, and means solitary, dedicated to God, holy. Thus Samson speaks of himself as a Nazarite, consecrated to God (Judges xvi, 17), and in every generation under the old dispensation there were men who cut themselves off from the world, making God their sole aim, and dedicating their whole life to virtue and the service of the Lord. Scripture describes Nazarites of this sort as "whiter than snow, purer than milk, fairer than the sapphire."*

The whiteness and purity of snow and milk symbolize the purity and innocence distinguishing these men, and the blue sapphire denotes the intention that animated them. It is easy to see how applicable in this sense the sacred name of Nazarite was to our Lord, and we ought to follow His example and be Nazarites of this kind. May innocence dwell in your hearts, and may your whole lives be characterized by perfect purity. Pray often to Jesus and ask Him to be your guide, so that you may avoid everything that would make you unlike Him. In every word and thought show yourselves worthy to bear His holy name. His mind was always set on heaven; strive to direct all your thoughts thither. Make it your habit in early life to seek the things of eternity, not those of this world. Let not the joys and amusements of this life be of great importance in your sight, but make it your aim day by day to become more worthy of the delights of heaven.

* They consecrated themselves to God by vows, or, like Samuel and Samson, were dedicated to His service by their parents. It was not usual for this dedication to be lifelong. The Nazarite law is given in Numbers vi.

Let it not be your chief object to please your fellow-creatures, but let the thought that influences you in all your occupations be to avoid incurring God's displeasure; yes, strive to become more pleasing to Him every day, and let this be the chief care of your hearts. The world is always trying to entangle us with the numberless fancies and cravings of earth, and to make us forget God, but may it never reign supreme over you, but rather may the good resolution to attain to holiness, and by way of holiness to heaven, motive all your actions. May heaven be far more real and far more desirable to you than earth, may eternal happiness far outweigh all the happiness of this life, and may God be far more precious to you than men. May your efforts to love and serve Him be like a brilliant sapphire adorning the crown of everlasting glory, which from childhood on you have been doing your best to earn. In this way you may be Nazarites indeed, holy, loyal to God, pure and heavenly-minded, like Jesus Christ, our great Example.

Jesus will help us, if we want to be Nazarites in this sense; the name itself assures us of His readiness to assist us, for, according to another interpretation, it means branch, offshot or blossom. This name was well suited to Him, for the prophet Isaias calls Him the rod or shoot coming out of the root of Jesse, and the flower rising up out of it, *i. e.*, out of David's family (Is. xi, 1). Jeremias, too, speaks of the bud of justice which is to spring forth from David (Jer. xxxiii, 15). This interpretation of the word Nazarite as meaning flower, branch or shoot suggests that in and through Christ alone we shall all find salvation; for our true welfare consists in our being most closely united with Him. If we are branches of the Nazarite, branches of the true vine (which is Christ), the sap of Divine grace will flow from Him into our hearts, and enable us to bring forth the good fruit of holiness of life

and purity of mind As branches we remain in union with Christ, forming part of that tree which bears good fruit for eternal life. Thus the word Nazarite reminds us that we ought to be branches of Christ, and just as the branch receives life from the stem, so ought we by His grace to receive the life of grace which will enable us to practise all the virtues that He desires. He, the Nazarite, the All-Holy, will help us, so that our hearts may become a fair garden, in which the noblest virtues are the flowers. As true Nazarites in this sense of the word, let us always ask our Lord not to withhold His grace, but to help us to practise all the virtues which will make us worthy of the name. Let us promise never to be ashamed of Him, but to cling to Him with holy faith and love. Well will it be for us when God calls us away from the exile of this life, if we are allowed to enter the eternal Nazareth, where Jesus is, and all His holy family, all who are truly His and have deserved to be called His elect, after living by His grace a life full of faith, purity and good will. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

"Jesus was subject to them."—Luke ii, 51.

Pride lies at the root of human misery, for it misleads men to their own disadvantage, and makes them set themselves up against God and their fellow men. Pride refuses to submit to any authority and leads only to destruction. Our Lord by His twofold obedience sets us a great example of humility, the virtue opposed to pride. He showed obedience to God by conforming to the Divine precept requiring Him to go to Jerusalem. But in order to show that obedience to human authority is always connected with obedience to God, He obeyed His holy Mother Mary and his foster-father, St. Joseph, and was subject to them. It is wonderful to think that the Son of God humbled Himself so far as to obey weak human beings. Nothing is better calculated to conquer the recklessness and pride that incline us to disobey those in authority over us, than the thought of the Child Jesus, listening to His parents' words in the little house at Nazareth, ready to do whatever they bid Him and eager to carry out their wishes precisely and without delay. He teaches us most emphatically to be obedient to our superiors; obedience directed all His actions throughout His life. Just as when a child He obeyed His parents, so later on He obeyed the rulers of the state, for instance by paying tribute. By His example He taught us patience even in the greatest sufferings, as He allowed Himself to be taken prisoner by the servants of those in authority, rebuked Peter for drawing his sword and healed the man's ear that had been cut off. "Be obedient to your superiors" is the lesson taught by the holy Child at twelve years

of age—be attentive to His words; for disobedience is a wrong not only to your superiors, but also to Him, since it is His will that you should obey them. To all superiors applies the commandment: "Thou shalt do whatsoever they shall say, that preside in the place which the Lord shall choose, and what they shall teach according to His law, and thou shalt follow their sentence, neither shalt thou decline to the right hand nor to the left hand" (Deut. xvii, 10, 11).

St. Peter tells us to "be subject to every human creature for God's sake," *i. e.*, although your superiors are only human beings like yourselves, the power that they have over you is from God. They are given you by Him, to order you, in His place, to do what is expedient for the whole community; hence you must be subject to them as His representatives. We see from these passages that obedience to superiors is a necessary consequence of obedience to God. It would be useless to imagine that you were pious and good servants of God if you did not try to pay the obedience due to your superiors, because God has set them over you.

Why does God require us to be obedient? Because without obedience every individual would be ruined and the whole of human society be thrown into confusion. Disobedience involves ruin for the individual. A child cannot understand what is good for him; he knows very little about the world, himself or Almighty God. He regards as good many things that would be injurious to him, and the corruption of our human nature makes him think most unpleasant what is most beneficial. Supposing a child were always to do only what he chose, and were not forced to follow the right course by the affectionate, but if necessary stern compulsion of his superiors, what would be the result? He would be ruined both

in body and in soul. But it is a mark of God's love that He sets people over the child, who by their care and authority can supply what he still lacks in the way of experience and training. Gratitude for such care ought to make children eager to obey, and where there is no obedience, there is only sinful ingratitude.

Not only children but grown-up persons also need guidance. Although a man may be able to form a correct opinion of himself and of the various circumstances of life, he may still not be able to consider all circumstances exactly, or to see everything in its true light; he may make mistakes and require some higher authority to keep him back from dangerous and harmful paths. Moreover, there are many passions apt to lead astray even intelligent and highly educated people. What a benefit it is for such, if they are subject to the authority of others, who can regard matters impartially, and how advantageous it is for them, if they do not cast good advice to the winds, but follow it! By doing so they are acting for their own welfare.

It follows from Holy Scripture that we ought to obey our superiors even if we do not know why they order us to do this or that, and do not see that the thing ordered is expedient for us.

True obedience consists in doing a thing simply because it is ordered. A man who obeys an order, merely because he sees that the thing ordered is advantageous to him, is obeying not so much his superior as his own understanding. Hence it is no excuse for disobedience if any one says: "I shall not do as I am told, because I do not see the good of it." A remark of this kind proves that he knows nothing of the principles underlying Christian obedience. The temptation to disobedience is still greater when pride in our own hearts and wills makes us fancy that we know the reasons why a certain command is laid upon us, but regard them as trivial,

and, as we understand the matter better than our superior, we need not obey him. What obedience would there ever be if every subordinate had first to criticize the reasons why he was ordered to do anything, and then decide whether they seemed satisfactory or not, thinking that he was bound to obey only if the reasons agreed with his own views. He would certainly discover that the reasons for doing anything disagreeable were insufficient, and only what was pleasant would appear obligatory, and thus his own will would take the place of obedience.

Suppose that every member of a large community or family, every person in a town or country, before obeying, had to decide whether the reasons for the command were clear and agreeable to him—what would happen?

One would refuse to obey, another would obey only partially, and complete confusion would result, families, towns and countries would be ruined. Obedience is the bond uniting human beings, and without it men must perish. Hence Church and State alike require us to obey. If you intend to be faithful members of the Church and good citizens,—in other words, if you mean to be genuine Christians, you must early accustom yourselves to obedience, not what is often called obedience nowadays, which is just doing what is pleasant, but real obedience paid to a superior regardless of your own opinions, simply because it is God's will that obedience be paid to superiors as His representatives. If you do not now accustom yourselves to obey them, you will never obey God Himself. Can we ever perceive what He has in view in the manifold circumstances of our life on earth? Are we not so shortsighted as often to be mistaken with regard to what God in His wisdom requires of us? Is not the life of a Christian an incessant submission to God in faith? Yes, unless we obey Him we shall never reach heaven,

which our forefathers lost by their disobedience. You will never obey God properly unless you learn betimes to submit to those in authority over you, who speak to you in His name. He who when young criticises the orders of his superiors, and rejects all that do not please him, will afterwards treat God's commandments in the same way. Experience shows us that atheists and unbelievers always begin by disobeying their parents and elders. Therefore, if you truly love God, and wish to be faithful to Him throughout your lives, regard obedience as a most sacred duty. Keep Jesus always before your eyes, and whenever a temptation to disobedience arises in your hearts, let the Divine Child look at you with love and say: "My child, I, too, was subject to Mary, My mother, and to My holy fosterfather." Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

"The mother of Jesus saith to Him: 'They have no wine.'"—John ii, 3.

Life is a marriage-feast at which people seem to sit comfortably side by side; every one appears to wish to contribute as much as possible to his neighbor's pleasure and happiness, and yet nothing fails so often as the wine of charity. Hence the Church to-day reminds us of the Holy Name of Jesus, to tell us that we, too, ought to invite Him to share our feast, so that if the wine of Divine love tends to fail, He may give it to us again. Jesus is the name of everlasting love, let us glorify it, and beg our Lord to come and take up His abode with us, and work in us spiritually the miracle that He wrought long ago in Cana. What was that miracle? He changed water—the less noble liquid—into wine—the more noble. To change what was worse into what was better, to transform a sinful human heart into one pleasing to God, was the task of His infinite love, and we, too, ought to strive to transform what is base within us into something honorable, and what is good into something better. Such is our task here on earth; in the midst of our mean, temporal exertions, cares and struggles, we have to earn the noblest of all treasures, heaven, eternal bliss. O happy indeed shall we be at the hour of death, when Jesus will turn our last tears, forced from us by the bitter deceptions of life, into the wine of everlasting joy!

The name of Jesus encourages us to cooperate with our Lord in the important business of transforming what is base within us into what is noble, in zealously working with Him at the task of our sanctification.

How can we do this? Let us ask Him how He effected the change of the lower into the higher, and then we shall see what we have to do. It was at a wedding that He changed water into wine, and He did it because He is always ready to listen to any one, and His kind heart is always disposed to grant every prayer. In a higher sense He had already accomplished what in a lower sense He did at the marriage feast. He came down from heaven and was born into the world, uniting His divine nature with our frail human nature, which was thus infinitely exalted and ennobled. The Church reminds us of this fact at every Mass, for, when the priest pours the wine into the chalice, he mixes it with water. The wine signifies our Lord's Divinity and the water His Humanity, as is stated in the prayer said by the priest: "O God, who didst wonderfully create and dignify the human race, and hast still more wonderfully reformed it; grant that by the mystery of this water and wine, we may be made partakers of His Godhead, who vouchsafed to become partaker of our manhood, Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord." Yes, by assuming our human nature, Christ united it with the divine nature in the unity of His Divine Person, and thus to some extent made us, weak mortals as we are, participators in His Divine Nature. What an honor for us! What a stimulus to do all in our power to become more worthy of this favor, to strive more and more to attain to the bliss that Jesus has obtained for us, and to become better, through growing in likeness to God. Why did our Lord do all this? Why did He unite His Humanity so closely with His Divinity? In order that humanity might be one with God. His incomprehensible love worked this miracle.

Yet this was not all. Man was to advance from one stage of perfection to another; and our Lord teaches us this lesson very beautifully. At the marriage feast He changed the water into wine,

and at the last supper He changed wine again into His Sacred Blood, that He shed for the remission of the sins of many. Over and over again, whenever Mass is said He allows this miracle of the changing of wine into His Blood to take place, that we may unite with Him, and through this close union may be gradually transformed and raised to the dignity of true children of God. What caused Him to do this? It was again His love, His infinite, incomprehensible love.

Now we can return to our former question: How can we cooperate with our Lord in the work of our sanctification? By entering into the infinite love of God; by letting ourselves, our hearts and minds be penetrated by that love, by letting every action in our whole life be in harmony with the words of Thomas à Kempis: "All is vanity, except to love God and serve Him alone." If we love God, the muddy water of sin must be changed into the refreshing wine of forgiveness. Love God, and in this love begin to fight against your passions, hard as the struggle may seem. Have you not in your heart a guest able to change water into wine? Can it be more difficult to convert you than to work this miracle? Both are hard things, far beyond your human strength, but nothing is too difficult for Him Whom you love, therefore be not despondent. One drop of evil passion after another will be changed in your heart to virtues, if only you suffer Him to do His Will, and cooperate with Him as far as you are able.

However much we exert ourselves and look to see what amount of good wine we have ready, we shall always have to confess that it is very, very little. This is not because our Divine Guest, whom we have lovingly invited, has not used His grace, but because in our carelessness we are always adding fresh water, that is to say, fresh sins, or because we are not exact in our obedience to the

orders that He gives, but imagine ourselves to know better than He does, and, therefore, the transformation of our poor weak hearts into strong and perfect ones is effected very slowly. We ought to acknowledge that even if we have toiled for a long time at our own improvement, we have not cast off all that is evil as much as we should have done. Do not let us be satisfied that in one or other respect the transformation of the water into wine has really taken place, but let us rather fix our attention upon the points where the change has not yet been effected. If you have improved, you have not yet improved as much as you might and ought to have done. Therefore, do not rest contented with the good wine that God's grace has poured into your hearts, but strive every day to become better and more perfect. You ask, perhaps, how you are to do this; by loving Jesus more day by day; love Him more deeply and let that be the aim of your lives.

Love of our Lord can change the water of your deeds, and works into the good wine of actions pleasing to God. How hard a man works who does not love God! He toils, labors, suffers and struggles, but because there is no love of our Lord in his heart, all his efforts are in vain, or, at best, deserve only an earthly reward; for work done without love of Jesus has its reward only in this world. But as soon as he begins to labor for love of our Lord, to do what He wills and because He wills it, then all his works are transformed into merit, entitling him to heaven as his reward, and at last the bitter cup of labor, toil and trouble will be filled with the golden wine of eternal happiness. Love Jesus daily more and more, and your whole lives will be changed, a commonplace succession of little tiresome duties and trivial annoyances and sufferings will become a series of good deeds, meriting an eternal recompense.

Love Jesus truly, and your hearts and minds will be changed! Our hearts and minds, even if not deeply stained with sin, are apt to be very poor and miserable. What can a heart feel that is void of love of God? Pleasure only in fleeting, childish and foolish things. And in the same way the thoughts of a mind without love of Jesus are never noble, but are prompted by wretched curiosity and interest in what is beneath our notice. Hearts and minds in which love of Jesus has no place, cling to foolish amusements and trivial gossip, to things that do not concern them and have no good results—truly a pitiable state of affairs. But the more fervent is our love of Jesus, the more will our hearts long for higher things and strive to attain them, and our minds will be inspired from above to know and desire what is holy, so that we shall become more accessible to all good influences and more kindly disposed towards our neighbors. What is hard in us will be softened, what is mean will be ennobled and what is stained and disfigured with sin will acquire a heavenly beauty. If you do your best to raise your hearts and minds, the improvement will be seen sooner or later in your outward life, which will be transformed, when true love of Jesus has penetrated, purified and transformed your hearts. You will be gentle and loving to your neighbors, doing much good and preventing much evil; you will do your duty cheerfully and willingly, and so benefit yourselves and others, and by your life, works and sufferings you will be sources of true holiness and happiness.

Love Jesus ever more and more, and your life that has hitherto perhaps been like water, rendering yourselves and others miserable, will be changed into the holy wine of love, gentleness and true piety.

Let us, therefore, invite our Lord to the marriage feast in our

hearts, where our earthly life is united to heaven. Let Him be our welcome guest, whose love will transform what is bad in us, so that sin may give place to purity; passions to virtues, work on earth to eternal merit, and our struggles here to glorious results and heavenly dispositions. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

"Jesus saith: 'I will come and heal him.'"—Matth. viii, 7.

Ever recurring separation governs all our life on earth. What time unites must also be separated by time, "for we have not here a lasting city" (Hebr. xiii, 14), and it is well for us that this is the case. The fact that we must necessarily be cut off from the things of this world makes us think of Him, from Whom we need never separate; and the remembrance of friends, lost to us by the circumstances of life or by death, and unable to console or help us, reminds us of One who is always near us and whose power to help never fails. Jesus is everywhere, always ready to assist us, and wherever He is, we find comfort, strength and blessing. He stood still beside the leper, stretched out His hand and healed him. To the centurion He said kindly: "I will come," although the Roman, being full of faith, knew that Jesus was really present with his sick servant, even if He did not actually come, and his faith was rewarded. Wherever Jesus is, we find comfort, strength and blessing, and He is always in every place; hence there can be no locality and no occasion when it is impossible for us to share His blessing. If we do not always receive it, or receive it only in a slight degree, it is because we do not remain in His presence; we do not remember that He is always with us, and so, though He is really present, He is not present for us, and by our own fault we lose the benefit of His constant and holy presence.

Of all the practices coming under the general heading of prayer, none is more important than a frequent remembrance of God's

presence. During the day we ought often to call to mind with lively faith the fact that God sees us and is ready to help us. If we say our prayers well in the morning, we consecrate our hearts to God, and throughout the day we ought to remember this consecration, until we say our evening prayers and go to sleep.

God commanded Abraham often to remember His presence, saying: "I am the Almighty God, walk before Me, and be perfect" (Gen. xvii, 1). The connection of the words here shows that to walk before God means continually to think that He is near us, and to let that thought lead us to true virtue and perfection. Call this divine precept often to mind: "Walk before me." In the same way the Holy Ghost, speaking through the Psalmist, says: "Seek the Lord and be strengthened, seek His face evermore" (Ps. civ, 4) This means, "If you never forget that He is near you, you will be strong to do right; under all circumstances remember Him, looking as it were at His face, and then His grace will always be a glance of His eyes resting upon you, admonishing, warning and encouraging you." We ought to be able to exclaim with David: 'To Thee have I lifted up my eyes, Who dwellest in heaven . . . as the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress, so are our eyes unto the Lord our God" (Ps. cxxii, 1, 2). Just as the handmaid should be ready to obey her mistress, so ought we often to look up to God and remind ourselves of His Will, saying, "I must do this or that, because He wills it." This living thought is a necessary condition of unfailing obedience on our part. For this reason all the fathers of the Church impress upon us the duty of constantly remembering the presence of God. St. Gregory Nazianzen writes: "In order to derive strength the body must be united with the soul, the branches with the trunk of a tree, and the sun's rays with the sun, and in the same way our spirit must be united

with God." "Come ye to Him and be enlightened, and your face shall not be confounded" (Ps. xxxiii, 6), that is to say: Think often of Him, and then His grace will enlighten you and show you under all circumstances what you ought to do, and your whole life will be such that you need not be ashamed before God, "for (adds St. Gregory) we ought to remember God more frequently than we draw breath."

What is more likely to deter us from wrong-doing than the thought, whenever we fall into temptation, that He sees us and is with us, Who will one day judge strictly all that is evil? In His infinite goodness He is now still willing to give us strength to overcome. "Tell me," says St. John Chrysostom, "tell me, if you had to stand continually before your Ruler or your Judge, would you not stand in awe of him? Therefore when you eat, think of God as present; before you fall asleep, and when anger is stirring in your heart, and in the hour of joy and amusement, in short, whatever you are doing, remember that God is there."

What could do more to strengthen our love of God than this remembrance of Him? If we are conscious of having a true love of God in our hearts, we shall be strong enough to conquer all the attacks of the evil one; and when one man, through not thinking of God, loses courage and says: "I cannot do right, it is too hard for me," another, who is mindful of God, finds fresh energy to begin and accomplish the good work. Much that seems hard becomes easy, if we know that people whom we love and honor are watching us, and delighting in our achievements. Even more then ought the thought of God strengthen us to do right.

Masters of the spiritual life suggest various methods of accustoming ourselves to remember God's presence. Some succeed in picturing our dear Saviour as present under the form that He had

on certain occasions in His Life on earth. We may think of Him as an Infant in the manger, as a Child in His Mother's arms, or during His Passion, as crowned with thorns and fastened to the Cross, whilst He turns upon us a glance of loving warning. Or we may picture Him walking beside us, just as when He went about His own country teaching the way of Salvation, or as He accompanied the disciples on the road to Emmaus, or like the Good Shepherd, anxious to lose none of His sheep. It is a good plan to avail ourselves of the thoughts suggested by the various ecclesiastical seasons, and to picture Jesus as present under the form in which each festival, as it recurs, represents Him.

[If any one feels that this practice involves too much strain, he had better give it up, as in that case it might easily prove injurious.]

Another method is to make an act of faith in God's presence, without trying to call up any imaginary picture. We all believe the truth expressed by the Apostle in the words: "God is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live and move and are" (Acts xvii, 27, 28). Let us accustom ourselves gradually to make everything about us, that we perceive by means of our senses, remind us of God's wisdom and goodness. An ordinary man, perceiving pleasant and useful things, thinks only of the pleasure and advantage that he derives from them, but a Christian remembers Him Who in His incomprehensible goodness has created all these things and bestowed them upon us in love. In this way everything about us may serve to make us think of God's universal presence.

The best way of all of thinking about God is to remind ourselves very often that He is dwelling in our innermost heart, as long as we possess sanctifying grace. St. Paul says: "Know you not that you are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (I. Cor. iii, 16). Let us resolve never to drive

Him from our hearts even by a sinful thought, but to keep them always filled with His Holy Love. When we are engaged in business or in society, we can address a short but heartfelt prayer to Him quite secretly, so that He may counsel, uphold and strengthen us, and that, just as He now dwells in our hearts, we, too, may some day dwell in glory and perpetual happiness with Him. Amen.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

"Go you also into my vineyard."—Matt. xx, 4.

God's chosen people had been compared even by the prophets to a vineyard, which God had treated most carefully, and which still did not prosper, because the Jews did not cooperate with His grace. Through the prophet Isaias God complained of this, saying: "What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it? Was it that I looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it hath brought forth wild grapes?" (Is. v, 4). Our Lord followed the same line of thought in two of His most impressive parables, where He compares the Jews with a vineyard to which the owner sent many servants and finally his own son, but all were killed by the wicked, disloyal workmen.

The vineyard was, therefore, the Jewish nation, and, in a wider sense, all mankind, who ought, in accordance with God's will, to attain to everlasting salvation and eternal life. Because the vineyard represents the whole of the human race, we may say that it represents also each individual soul, since the race is made up of individuals. If each one diligently cultivated his own vineyard, *i. e.*, his own soul, the whole human race would be sanctified and saved. In to-day's gospel our Lord says that the householder sent laborers into his vineyard, but He does not only mean that we ought to be diligent in saving the souls of others in His Church, but that we ought to be zealous, primarily, for our own salvation. Nothing is more common than for people always to be criticizing the words and actions of others, and judging their disposition from what they

do and say, inferring that in one way or another they are not zealous enough in working out their salvation; nothing is more common than for people continually to be anxious about the souls of others and to neglect their own. This so-called anxiety for the salvation of others is often nothing but a sinful love of criticism that delights in discovering the faults of others; it is a kind of spiritual pride, making us think ourselves better than other people and exalting ourselves above them. Beware always of forming unnecessary opinions regarding others under the pretext of lamenting over the neglected vineyard of their souls. Thousands of sins are committed and thousands of unkind remarks are made under the specious pretext of being anxious for the salvation of others.

If you want to find out whether you really care for the souls of others in the way that Jesus desires, ask yourselves whether you really take pains every day to improve yourselves, to learn what is right and to do it, to uproot evil by strict self-denial, etc. As long as you are not careful about these things, there is reason to fear that your criticisms of others, which you fancy are the result of your anxiety for their salvation, are really sinful, and in the end it is quite possible that many a vineyard, whose neglected condition you have often deplored, may prove to be more beautiful than the vineyard of your own soul. When Martha complained of Mary, our Lord said: "But one thing is necessary, and Mary hath chosen the best part" (Luke x, 42). What part had Mary chosen? Was she like Martha, full of energy and activity in her housekeeping, but nevertheless able to find time to criticize her sister, and wonder why she did nothing to help, maintaining that this was not right and that our Lord ought to rebuke her? Martha, pious as she was, tended to err by reason of her excessive care that others should do their duty. But what of Mary? Did she think perhaps

that Martha cared little for her salvation and was too much interested in worldly affairs? No, she sat at our Lord's feet and drank in His words; she was anxious about her own salvation, and it was for this that Jesus praised her; for He knew that only those who are careful for their own salvation, who truly attend to His teaching and struggle after virtue in their own hearts, will ever be able to promote the salvation of others. He seems to have rebuked Martha for judging too hastily, and to have meant: "You are troubled because your sister is not quite doing her duty and acting in accordance with my teaching, which would have her work as well as pray; but do not be disturbed. By listening attentively now she is promoting the welfare of her own soul, and making herself fit to do a great deal in future for the souls of others." It is of course our duty as Christians to help others on the way to salvation, as far as we can, and especially it may be important for you to be able to counsel and guide others. If you wish to be capable of doing this, it behooves you in your youth to sit attentively at our Lord's feet, learning and doing what is expedient for your own salvation. The more careful you are now about it; the more zealously you learn to control your evil inclinations, to cure your faults, to practise virtue, and to prefer God and His holy word to all worldly pleasures, the better will you be able eventually to show others the way to be saved.

Care for our salvation is necessary if we are to practise properly charity towards our neighbor, and we cannot truly love God unless we take care to be saved. Why should we be ungrateful to Him? Does God suffer any loss if we do not attain to salvation? Is he less happy if our souls are lost? No one is so foolish as to think this; but when a man does not work out his salvation, he frustrates God's loving purpose of making him happy forever, and so he

defeats the object which he had as one of God's creatures, and which is that of all those who serve Him.

He who is not zealous for the salvation of his own soul, is ungrateful for all the mercies of God's grace bestowed upon the human race from the time of Adam to that of Christ. If you read the Old Testament, and all the wonderful miracles and prophecies; if you considered in how marvellous and loving a manner God prepared the Jewish nation for the coming of the Redeemer, your hearts would always be moved by the thought: "God did all this for my sake; for thousands of years He was caring for my soul, in order that I might reach heaven. Yes, God has done so much for me, and shall I be unwilling to do anything for myself?"

But if we read the New Testament, how can we possibly see what Jesus taught, and consider His miracles, without feeling how deep would be our ingratitude, if we allowed all these results of His infinite love for us to be wasted? Let us often think of Him, and the gentleness, goodness and wisdom with which He has taught us, and let us promise to be obedient to His will in every detail. If ever our own comfort, our frivolity or any other temptation tends to lead us astray, and make us careless about our salvation, let us look at the Crucifix and renew our resolution to bear the Cross of self-conquest for love of Him who laid down His life for us.

Finally, if we look back at our own lives, we shall see plainly how lovingly God has cared for the welfare of our souls. He gave us strength to rise higher, reason and free will; but, besides all this, in His infinite mercy He has given us opportunities of learning what is right, and of perceiving better than many others what is conducive to our souls' good; He has lavished upon us graces making for our salvation. How often has He strengthened us in

hours of temptation! How often has He preserved us from evil, and forgiven us our sins; yes, He has even nourished us with His own Body and Blood, in order that we may be His children, and be saved. It would indeed be the most horrible ingratitude to cast all these graces aside recklessly, caring nothing for our salvation, for the securing of which He in His incomprehensible love has supplied us with so many natural and supernatural means.

True love of God and our neighbor shows us how necessary it is to care for the welfare of our souls. Genuine self-love imposes this duty upon us all, for nothing but care for our own salvation, and zealous work in the vineyard of our own souls can make us worthy to receive at night the payment promised to all faithful and dutiful laborers.

Let us resolve to-day and often renew our resolution—If hitherto through carelessness and want of thought we have been negligent in attending to the welfare of our souls, we will do better in future, and try to let the good that is in us increase, by the help of God's grace, so that we may bring forth forever fruits of amendment and good works. Amen.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

"A sower went to sow his seed."—Luke viii, 5.

"When a very great multitude was gathered together and hastened out of the cities unto Him, He spoke by a similitude." Very many people assembled to hear Jesus, brought no doubt by various motives. Some came out of mere curiosity, so as to be able to say: "I have heard Him"—probably there were few whose hearts were eager to receive His teaching, and the parable that He uttered shows this to have been the case.

Jesus looked at all the crowd, but an outward glance did not have much effect; then He looked into them all, and all their hearts lay bare and open before Him as He began to speak, to teach them how these hearts should appear and how they should not appear, when the word of God was preached to them.

Your hearts, too, lie open in our Lord's sight. You may be able to hide from men how much or how little you care for the salvation of your souls, but you can conceal nothing from Jesus. You may impress men with an idea that you are deeply interested in the things of God, but you cannot deceive God. You may mislead men by a merely respectable, orderly way of life, devoid of all inward love and fervor, but your appearance, looks and manners are nothing to our Lord, who cares only for your hearts, and not the outward husk, as it were, of your hearts, but their inmost centre. We may describe as the outward husk our feelings, which appear to be good, gentle and pious, but, like the apples of Sodom, often contain nothing but repulsive dust and ashes. The centre of the

heart is the will, which should be firm and steadfast, ready for any conflict and any suffering for the sake of what is right. This is what our Lord sees, and He found it in very few of the multitude that followed Him.

We are but few; would that He could find such a good will in every one of us, few as we are! May the seed of the word of God, sown by the Divine Sower, not remain without fruit in our hearts! "The sower went out to sow his seed, and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it." Our Lord Himself explained this parable: "The seed is the word of God, and they by the wayside are they that hear, then the devil cometh and taketh the word out of their heart, lest, believing, they should be saved."

Our Divine Master speaks of the word of God as *seed*, it is not yet fruit. The seed requires labor on the part of men and God's blessing before it can grow, blossom and bear fruit. Much toil and exertion are necessary before God's word can produce in us true piety, and practical, living Christianity. It is not enough merely to hear and know God's word. The misleading argument: "I have *learned* my religion" is worthless; we must be able to say also: "I have *practised* it, practised it by self-denial and wholesome severity towards myself."

Why do so many people *learn* our holy religion, and yet possess so little real religion? At school they sit and listen, they go to church and hear sermons, and in the confessional they receive good advice. They talk about pious subjects, they read good books; they romance about supernatural things, but their way of life remains unaffected by all this. They take no pains to practise their religion, nor to make the seed of God's word bear fruit. Our Lord referred to those who hear, but

do not practise what they hear, in the third part of the parable, where He compares their hearts with a much trodden path, where the seed is trampled down and carried away by the birds.

I teach and preach, and scatter the seed of God's word in the name of Christ; but what is the use of my speaking to you, if your hearts are set only on earthly desires and fancies, and if you do not try to control your perverse inclinations, your whims and fancies, your temper and passions? What I say makes no impression upon you, for you are hard as a well-trodden path. The word is uttered; it is a tiny seed and yet how powerful! The sound of the word soon dies away, but your sentence of everlasting misery or eternal happiness depends upon your reception of it with a hard or a docile heart. Your hearts should be docile, not soft and yielding to sweet, romantic feelings, but ready to accept what is good. Some day we shall meet again, face to face, before our Judge, who will ask: "Where is the fruit of the seed that I entrusted to you to scatter?"—"Lord, I scattered it with a good and honest purpose." "But where is the fruit?"—"Lord, it was my task only to sow the seed; it did not depend upon me whether it fell on good soil or on bad." And then the Judge will turn to you and ask again: "Where is the fruit?" Well will it be for you if you can produce some; but if you cannot, excuses will avail you nothing.

Many people on that day will probably plead as an excuse that the birds of the air devoured the seed, *i. e.*, that the devil took the word away from my heart. Adam and Eve put the blame of their transgression upon Satan, and human beings have always followed their example But would he be able to take away the seed from a heart in which it was planted deep in the love of God? Such an excuse is worthless. If your heart had not been hardened by the footsteps of worldly thoughts and by the constant hurrying to and

fro of evil thoughts and desires, Satan could not have carried away the seed of the Word of God, for he has power only over such as are superficial and frivolous, not over those who love God. The excuse is worthless and the punishment eternal.

You ought to have soft hearts when you come to hear the word of God;—soft, not in the sense of being effeminate or emotional, but in that of being ready to receive what is good. Our hearts are softened to emotion at times of prayer as well as in temptation; in prayer, they are inclined towards what is good, in temptation towards what is evil. Emotion makes us shed tears when our sins are laid bare before our eyes, and tears, too, of self pity, when we have to carry out our good resolutions. Emotion leads us to listen patiently both to the teaching of religion and also to words and suggestions against it. Emotion makes us enthusiastic admirers of morality and yet is easily led away by the false doctrines of immorality. It exists simultaneously with the hardness of heart that arises from the constant action of a worldly disposition.

But softness of heart is compatible with firmness and strength of character, the want of which often causes the sower to sow in vain, and the birds of the air, that is to say, bad companions, bad books and bad examples, to destroy the seed, so that many hear the word of God, but have no faith and therefore are not saved.

Think often of this first part of to-day's gospel! Consider how necessary it is for strength of character to be united with readiness to accept all that is good. May God preserve your hearts from the two fatal extremes, which have plunged so many into destruction, namely, weak emotion and the hardness of a worldly disposition. Amen.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

"A blind man sat by the wayside begging,"—Luke xviii, 35.

St. Gregory tells us that we ought to consider our Saviour's miracles, not only so as to acquiesce in the truth of the facts recorded, but also so as to regard them as types of other higher truths.

Thus in to-day's gospel we think with admiration of our Lord's mercy and power in restoring sight to the blind man, but at the same time we learn to regard the man suffering from physical blindness as a type warning us against spiritual blindness. The gospel teaches us to avoid the latter, since it makes us incapable of seeing what tends to our eternal salvation, blind to the guidance of those desirous of helping us, blind to everything that does not flatter our own self will and sensual inclinations, blind to the truth, to duty and to heaven.

"A blind man sat by the wayside begging."

All theologians refer these words to the misery of spiritual blindness; especially St. Francis of Sales has chosen these words as representing vividly the intense wretchedness of a spiritually blind soul. A blind man is in a pitiable state; he sees none of the natural objects around him; sky and earth are adorned with all God's wonderful works, but he cannot see them, cannot, like those who have sight, be roused to admiration and delight by the contemplation of their beauty.

When Tobias became blind, he described his sad condition in words that call forth our sympathy, saying: "What manner of joy

shall be to me, who sit in darkness and see not the light of heaven?" This literal blindness typifies spiritual blindness and ignorance. The most important truths concerning our salvation are concealed from one who is spiritually blind, and he understands nothing of them. "Blind men of this sort," says an old author, "do not see God above them who will judge them, nor Satan before them, who will drag them down, nor death behind following them, nor hell below awaiting them."

Be grateful for the opportunities given you by God in His goodness, of raising the eye of your minds straight to the light of the true faith, the knowledge of what conduces to your salvation. Pray that God may enlighten your hearts and minds more and more with His light; beg Him never to let your hearts grow blind to faith, hope and charity. The blind will never see Jesus, and it is only if, by no fault of our own, we have passed our lives here in blindness, that we shall nevertheless behold Him in everlasting light.

A blind man *sat* by the wayside. The fact that he *sat* indicates the inability of the spiritually blind to do anything meritorious. "What else could he do?" says St. Francis of Sales, "or where should he go? He had no alternative but to sit idle, dirty, despised and a burden to himself. In the same way the spiritually blind are devoid of good works and are habitually entangled in sins, laden like prisoners with fetters." The Christian who has faith and spiritual sight, who looks up to Jesus and makes good use of every hour of his life, striving to do everything for love of God, stamps all his works, even the most trivial, with the mark of merit, but the spiritually blind man wastes his time, doing nothing to secure his salvation, for what he does is done merely from some worldly motive, and not through faith and love of God, and there-

fore it gives him no claim upon heaven. At the end of his life he might as well have done nothing; he is like the servant who buried his talent in the earth and won no merit, hence, when he dies, he appears before his Judge empty-handed.

Let the love of God guide you in all your works, for it is the light without which we can earn no merit for eternity. As St. Paul says in to-day's epistle: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal" (I. Cor. xiii, 1).

Nothing is of any good unless we love God. Say often in your hearts: "All for love of Thee, O God!"

The blind man sat *by the wayside*. Jesus said: "I am the way," but the spiritually blind man is on a different road from that indicated by our Lord, for he is in unbelief or sin, and sits by the way on which the fleeting things of earth appear of the utmost importance. In the Book of Wisdom we have a description of the spiritually blind who lament saying: "We have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us, and the sun of understanding hath not risen upon us. We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways, but the way of the Lord we have not known" (v. 6, 7). May you never have cause to utter such a lamentation! Avoid the first step off the path of faith and goodness. The hour when a man in his blindness turns away from Jesus is the saddest in all his life. In vain does he deceive himself, thinking: "I shall soon come back; I am taking only a little step." At the very beginning of the wrong path a sort of glamor lays hold upon us, leading us further and further astray. Our feet are entangled in cunningly laid snares, and it is only when the evil one is practically sure of his prey that the fascination vanishes, and all the attractive things around us are

revealed in their true colors, all the friendly faces appear to be hideous masks, and the garlands adorning the paths of sin prove to be scourges.

The right way is far distant, scarcely visible though bright and clean, and the wanderer thinks it a hopeless undertaking to return to it. Whence shall a soul, weakened by sin, derive courage enough to find it? She has for a long time in her folly rejected the grace of God;—will she now have confidence enough to rely upon this grace? Above all things fear the first step on the wrong road.

A blind man sat by the wayside *begging*.

St. Francis of Sales remarks that blind people are generally so situated that they are poor and forced to ask alms of others. The spiritually blind, however, are weighed down by much more distressing poverty, and we may apply to them what St. John says in the Apocalypse: "Thou sayest: 'I am rich and made wealthy and have need of nothing,' and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (iii, 17). If you give yourselves up to unbelief and sin, you may possess all the riches in the world, and still be poor and worthy of pity. He alone is rich whose heart is rich; and the man who is spiritually blind is poor; his soul is poor in God's grace; his imagination is poor in thoughts of a glorious future; his memory is poor in the remembrance of good works; his will is poor in good resolutions to do right; and his heart is poor in Divine love and heavenly comfort.

He begs the world for true peace of heart, and the world passes him by, flinging him some paltry alms; worldly pleasures go by, giving him perhaps a fleeting hour of amusement; worldly honors go by, and give him money that satisfies the eyes, but not the heart. Now and then the blind man is happy, but, just as the little coins flung to a beggar are soon spent, so the trifling joys afforded by

earth may for a moment deaden the pain of his heart, but can never give it lasting peace.

Peace will come only when he cries: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon me." Therefore, do you also cry earnestly: "Jesus, Son of David, Light of the World, I will be faithful to Thee until death, may I never lose my sight, and never live in such a way as that the sorrowful words: 'A blind man sat by the wayside begging,' may be applicable to me."

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

"Then Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil."—Matt. iv, 1.

Jesus, as far as He was Man, was guided by the Holy Spirit, and feeling impelled by the Spirit to go into the desert, He went without delay. Christians, in whom the Holy Ghost dwells, are prompted to do right and practise good works, and St. Paul says: "Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. viii, 14). If we wish to be true children of God, we must follow the promptings of His Holy Spirit, who stimulates our will to what is good, but does not compel us to do it, because we are free to cooperate with His action.

Even the holiest suggestions of the Holy Ghost remain fruitless, unless we exert ourselves to comply with them. This is why our knowledge is so often fruitless, our resolutions vain and our desires unfulfilled; this is why so many of our days are wasted, and in spite of pious thoughts and words we make no progress in well-doing. We ought to be able to say always with the Psalmist: "I have run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou didst enlarge my heart" (Ps. cxviii, 32).

It is for the Holy Ghost to enlighten, lead and urge us on our way, but it is for us to run; we ought, however, to be on our guard not to confuse our own ideas and the suggestions of our own vanity and self-love with the promptings of the Holy Spirit. A work which we feel impelled to undertake may in itself be excellent, and yet our impulse to do it may not proceed from the Holy Ghost; and we often must examine our motives very carefully before we can be sure that our impulse is from God.

Supposing we discover some bad motive, for instance, a desire to please ourselves; or supposing, when doing some unusually good deed, we do it because of an obstinate determination to do something extraordinary, although it involves the neglect of what is strictly our duty,—then the impulse is *not* from the Holy Ghost, or, at least, it is not altogether from Him, but self-love is mingled with it. Where this is the case, we are led, not by the Spirit that led our Lord, but by the spirit of self-will, that is none the better for being hidden under a cloak of piety, but is more dangerous and destructive than other forms of obstinacy. Let us therefore ask God always to preserve us from any impulse proceeding from self-will that pretends to be pious, but, on the contrary, to give us strength at all times and in all circumstances to follow the Holy Spirit.

The desert chosen by our Lord for His forty days' fast was that known now as Quarantana, between Jerusalem and Jericho, the same wilderness in which, according to Christ's parable, the man travelling from Jerusalem fell into the hands of robbers, and was afterwards found and rescued by the Good Samaritan. The fathers of the Church regard this man as a type of the whole human race, which had fallen under the dominion of sin, and had been robbed of the supernatural life of sanctifying grace, whilst the Samaritan, who saved and healed mankind, was our Lord Himself.

Therefore, He began to prepare Himself for the task of saving and healing souls in the very desert where the Samaritan had prefigured Him by showing charity to the wounded traveller.

"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil."

We must not understand these words to mean that the Holy Ghost arranged the temptation, but rather that He foresaw how

Jesus would be tempted there, and allowed it. Why should Jesus be tempted? Was it befitting the character of the Messias? Yes, and we may learn most consoling lessons from the reasons why He was tempted. St. John Chrysostom tells us that it was His will to suffer the temptation, in order that those who after Baptism are grievously assailed by it, may not be discouraged and confused, as if something extraordinary were befalling them, but may withstand the temptation steadfastly, regarding it as a necessary sequel to their confession of faith. They have taken up arms in order to fight, not to remain at peace. Hence the thought of our Saviour's temptation in the wilderness should give us comfort; the fact of being tempted is no reason for sorrow, and all excessive sadness, anxiety and confusion in time of temptation are injurious, for they diminish our confidence and courage, and therefore are allies of the evil one. It is no sin to be tempted; the sin is to consent to temptation.

With what calm dignity did Jesus encounter the tempter! It was His will to undergo temptation to teach us how we ought to act when tempted; and the first lesson that we learn from His example is to trust quietly in God. Excessive fear suggests the thought that it is impossible for us to resist. Such fear may appear pious, but it is really very bad, and we ought to answer the suggestion by saying: "Of course I cannot resist in my own strength, but I can do so through Him whose incomprehensible love makes Him always ready to help us with His power."

Our Lord displayed His infinite love by allowing Himself to be tempted. He wanted to show us how thoroughly in every point He became one of ourselves, sin only excepted. He went into the wilderness to prove clearly that as He was tempted Himself, He can help those who are also tempted, and that He won strength and

grace for us to be able to resist, as He did. Therefore, if we study His temptation, we shall be delivered from all doubt as to our ability to resist our own; and we shall be firmly convinced of His love, ever powerful to help us; we shall be inflamed with love of Him, and shall rejoice when this love is put to the test in many painful struggles, and our repeated victories procure us more merit for heaven.

The temptations undergone by our Lord in the wilderness were not the only ones that He suffered,—He was tempted to the hour of His death. Were not the threats and persecution of His enemies temptations, suggesting to Him to abandon His sacred task of teaching, consoling and saving mankind? But neither the temptations of the devil nor the hostility of men could make Him disloyal to His heavenly Father. He triumphed in the turmoil of the city and amidst the outcry of His angry foes, as He had done on the lonely banks of the Jordan. Like His resurrection, His whole life and His death were an uninterrupted triumph; and the life of every Christian should be the same. We know not what our life may bring forth, nor does it matter, if only the whole of it is a victory over temptation and sin. Let us beg the Holy Ghost to guide and direct us, promising to obey His suggestions, admonitions and commands. When the last temptation has left us, death will carry us up to the summit of the holy mountain, and we shall behold the indescribable happiness bestowed by God upon those who worship Him, and our lot will be with the angels in heaven. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

"He was transfigured before them."—Matt. xvii, 2.

Our Lord was transfigured before His three most highly favored disciples, Peter, James and John, on a lonely mountain whither He had led them. He shows Himself in His glory to those who seek Him apart from the world, in prayer and meditation. He was transfigured before the three Apostles who were especially to bear witness to Him; before Peter, the Head of the Church; James, who as bishop of Jerusalem was the first of the Apostles to die a martyr's death, and John, destined to outlive all the rest, and to preach to the faithful even to the end of the first century, defending our Lord's divinity against the attacks of unbelievers and heretics.

He was transfigured before them, that His subsequent Passion might not make them waver in their faith. He was transfigured before them that, when afterwards He should hang upon the Cross, they might see in Him not a weak, dying human being, but God incarnate, revealing His majesty most gloriously in the humiliation and shame of His suffering. He was transfigured because of His Passion, and His Passion was His transfiguration. The Church points to this truth by ordering the gospel account of the transfiguration to be read in Lent. Suffering and pain transfigure men also, for pain marks a man off from others, and to generous hearts a sufferer is more worthy of honor than a prosperous person. Pain borne with patience gives us the impression of being something great; it arouses our sympathy and draws us nearer together. Sorrow endured in common has far greater power to unite men

than joy. Pain can transform men, and we feel the truth of this fact deep in our hearts, and it is confirmed by a sort of affectation, very common at the present time, which aims at imitating pain, and makes people delight in fancied misfortunes and imaginary sufferings, so that they delude themselves and others with the idea that they are lonely and forsaken, hoping thus to make themselves interesting to themselves and others, and to have at least the appearance of being transformed by pain. Of course this kind of imaginary suffering has no transforming effect whatever, but only obscures one's understanding, for a morbid desire of pain, a fancy that one is unhappy, is a proof of want of sense.

Real pain not only transforms us in the sight of others, but a soul that actually suffers is transformed by manifold kinds of experience, dearly bought but very precious, and by a kind of steadfastness and courage derived from pain. This is true of merely ordinary suffering, but it is still more true of that endured by a Christian who strives to follow our Lord's example.

Before His transfiguration on Thabor the face of Christ shone as the sun and His garments became white as snow, and when afterwards He was transfigured by the infinite love with which He suffered on Calvary, His head was crowned with thorns in token of His transfiguration by suffering. To this crown of thorns the Church refers the following prophecy of Holy Scripture: "Go forth, ye daughters of Zion (ye faithful souls) and see Solomon in his diadem" (Cant. iii, 11). "Solomon" means peaceful, and we know who is the true Solomon, the real Bringer of Peace, whose head was crowned with the most glorious diadem, even the crown of thorns, marking His transfiguration by pain. It is also the crown of His mercy, for when was divine mercy ever displayed more unmistakably than when our Saviour, being crowned

with thorns, suffered for us, when He cried with a loud voice: "It is consummated. Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit"?

At that moment the angels in heaven exulted, crying: "Praise ye the Lord, for His mercy is great, and of His goodness there is no end." But on earth there was a solemn silence as when the spirit of God moved over the waters at the creation, for now the great work was accomplished which should cause a new race to rise from the waters of baptism, free from the dreary darkness of sin. Christ's crown of thorns was also the crown of His mercy and likewise of His triumph on earth.

As a crown it reminds us that He who wears it is a King, the King of righteousness, and in heaven it has been changed into a crown of glory. As Jesus on the Cross bent His head, crowned with thorns, many graves of just men were opened; and when He comes as Judge, wearing the crown of glory, all graves will be opened, and all the just will rise again. With joy will they behold the glory of their King, from whose hand they will themselves receive their crowns. With what gratitude will they then think of the crown of thorns that obtained such glory for them! In the same way, for the disciples as well as for their Master, all earthly pain will be transfigured in eternity.

Our own crown of thorns will often inspire us with sympathy for the sorrows of others. He who has suffered much himself knows how to comfort and help others, and thus his crown of thorns is also turned into a crown of mercy.

Our Lord's crown of thorns reminds us also of His divine justice, which will one day exact a terrible penalty from those who have been disloyal to their King and have rejected the crown of earthly suffering. A man makes a right use of suffering if he

lets it encourage him to practise Christian justice, and is led on by it to virtue and away from evil. It is better for us to suffer and to be united with God than to live in pleasure and amusement apart from Him. Every sorrow ought to remind us of the justice of God, who in His love leads us to heaven on a thorny path, in order that eternal suffering may not be our lot hereafter.

Let us, therefore, profit by the thorny crown of suffering, and never forget to live so as to please God, and then our crown will some day obtain for us the crown of glory, transfiguration on His holy mountain, and complete fulfilment of all that He in His infinite love has promised us through Moses and the Prophets and the holy Apostles. Our Lord's transfiguration was effected by suffering, and so is that of every true Christian whose heart gathers strength from suffering, and who is encouraged by it not to swerve from the path of duty, but to go forward bravely until he attains the crown of everlasting glory.

We have looked at Jesus transfigured on Thabor and crowned with thorns on Calvary, and we have learned that pain is intended to transform a Christian; but if it only casts a cloud of discontent and anger, of selfishness and sin over his soul, there can be no transfiguration either on earth or in heaven, but thorns of suffering in both this life and the next. May the crown of earthly pain some day be changed for us all into that of everlasting glory and happiness. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

"Every kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation, and house upon house shall fall."—Luke xi, 17.

Our Lord was proving that He did not drive out devils by aid of the devil, and pointed out that wherever strife, emulation and division prevail, desolation and destruction must inevitably follow. He took as His illustration a kingdom divided against itself, the people being engaged in civil war; and He argued that it was impossible for the devil to be helping Him to drive out devils.

These words may, however, teach us another excellent lesson, viz.: that if we suffer discord to reign within us, we must expect nothing but misery. Yet such discord is very common; it is a state of discontent due to absence of peace of mind, in spite of the enjoyment of temporal prosperity. We want to serve God without denying ourselves; we accuse ourselves again and again of our faults, repent of them and mourn over them, and then commit them afresh.

This discord entered into us with original sin, since which time, as St. Paul says, the flesh has been warring against the spirit; and we can overcome this inward disturbance only by the grace of Him who has crushed the serpent's head. It ceases to torment us when what is good and noble in us has obtained permanent dominion over what is evil and base. If with our whole mind and strength we are in union with God, peace and harmony will reign in our hearts and make us happy, for we shall be freed from that inward discord that drags us this way and that, now to what is good, and now to what is evil, and is an incessant source of restlessness and spiritual misery.

If we wish to avoid this inward discord and discontent, this sense of unhappiness at heart, we must be resolute. First of all try to ascertain clearly what God wants of you; for where there is no real recognition of His will there will be constant uncertainty and questioning whether we ought to do this or that; and in such a state of doubt determined action is impossible. A man, wandering in the dark in an unknown locality, cannot take a decided step forward. We need, in the first place, a definite knowledge of our duties, and our reason will enable us to obtain this. It is, therefore, most essential to avail ourselves of every opportunity of developing our reason. The less training is bestowed upon our reason, the more apt is our imagination to run riot, and imagination is never a safe guide to tell us our duty. We may strive in vain to be pious if we allow our imagination to decide what is our duty; for it is easily influenced by sensuality and self-love, it is ready to take a false view of things and to regard what is absolutely wrong as permissible, or even as good and noble. No inconsiderable part of modern literature bears witness to this truth, for barefaced wickedness is often represented as harmless and justified, whilst the moral teaching is so distorted, and absurd eccentricities so highly praised as genuine virtue, that it is really no wonder if uncritical readers store up in their minds the most contradictory views regarding morality. The peculiar moral teaching in such books is no whit better or less injurious than downright immorality. Even if the teaching has a good tendency, making for virtue and piety, it is not on that account much less dangerous than if it diverges altogether from the right path; perhaps it discovers sins where there are no sins, and makes exaggerated demands upon its victim, plunging him into deep depression, because he is unable to comply with these demands, and, by robbing him of all courage, it leads him astray from what is

good. A truly religious training of the intellect is most essential to give us clear and definite principles regarding our duty. When you have once recognized something as a duty, pleasing to God, "Be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus" (II. Tim. ii, 1).

When you have made a good resolution, be true to yourselves and to Christ; do not waver to and fro. Doubts may arise within you, and various opinions and temptations; hours may come when you are inclined to change your mind, since what appeared at first to be right may seem doubtful and uncertain. Do not yield to these temptations; renew your resolution that you formed after due deliberation and after earnest prayer.

To act in one way to-day, and in another to-morrow—to sow to-day and to root up to-morrow, to build to-day and to pull down to-morrow—all this leads to nothing, especially in striving after piety. If we go on in this way, one day will pass after another and the day of our death will find us as devoid of merit as the day of our birth. Be strong to resist all fickleness that is due to your own changes of mind.

Be strong, too, against fickleness due to outward influences. It is not much good to have a pious heart if it is not at the same time steadfast. If it were our lot to be always with friends like ourselves, anxious to lead good lives, then it would be easy enough to be good. If we always had a hand to guide us, or a voice to warn us, our own want of determination might be replaced by that of others. But a Christian has to go out into the world and stand his ground there. It is not difficult to be resolute in quiet retirement, but to abide by what has once for all been recognized as a right, although countless voices reject it as foolish, false and ridiculous—that is a difficult task. The world has often been compared with a market, and the comparison is apt. Especially at the present time there is so much

confusion of opposing theories, each man wishing to draw attention to his own, so that, unless we cling fast to Jesus Christ, we shall be hopelessly bewildered. One person extols as a virtue what another scorns as folly; and one calls noble what another denounces as mean. As a rule all the rabble on the market-place are of one mind only when they can abuse the Catholic Church and despise true virtue. If you do not accustom yourselves, when you are young, to hold fast what you know to be good, caring nothing for taunts and mockery, and not being credulous in contradiction, you are only too likely to adopt one perverse doctrine after another, and to become the plaything of all in turn. You will let yourselves be persuaded that black is white, and white is black, and finally you will not know what you ought to believe and do, and you will be aware in the depths of your hearts that you are not in union with God, and your souls will be distracted with that anxiety and discontent that are so common nowadays, because without Jesus there can be nothing but discord in our hearts.

How can we overcome want of resolution in ourselves and of weakness in face of temptations and false teaching from without? "If God be for us," says St. Paul, "who can be against us?" (Rom. viii, 31), and this thought is our comfort and strength. By means of earnest prayer, renewal of good resolutions, and constant efforts to increase our knowledge of our holy religion, we may steady ourselves, and God will give us strength and not allow any one to be at variance with His better self, but will help us to act as we think, and always to think in a way pleasing to Him. He will warn you when false principles are likely to mislead you; He will help you to unite true piety with steadfastness of purpose. "Every kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation, and house upon house shall fall." Every soul that is really united with God, and

determined to continue one with Him, will be a kingdom of God and an abode of His grace. No cunning, no deception and no malice will succeed in robbing such a soul of its faith and goodness; it will serve God with inward peace until He calls it to our everlasting home. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

"Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?"—John vi, 5.

A great multitude was following Jesus, because they had seen the miracles that He wrought on the sick. These words show us why the Church has selected this Gospel to be read during Lent. This holy season should encourage us to follow Jesus with zeal, to cling to Him without wavering, and to be loyal to Him always. The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand ought to quicken and strengthen our zeal. The events leading up to this wonderful occurrence were the following: Our Lord had sent out His disciples two and two, that they might preach the Kingdom of Heaven and the coming of the Redeemer. On their return they reported to Him what they had done. About the same time Herod began to be suspicious regarding Jesus, of whose teaching and deeds he had heard. St. Luke says: "Now Herod, the tetrarch, heard of all things that were done by Him, and he was in doubt because it was said by some that John was risen from the dead, and by other some that Elias hath appeared, and by others that one of the ancient prophets hath arisen. And Herod said: 'John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?' and he sought to see Him. And the Apostles, when they were returned, told Him all they had done" (Luke ix, 7-10). Our Lord knew well what Herod meant by wanting to see Him, and, to avoid this danger, and also to give His disciples some rest after their journey, He crossed by boat from the west to the east side of the Sea of Galilee, and went into a desert region. The multitude, however, having witnessed His miracles and heard His teaching, watched with dismay the departure of Him whom they revered so much; and sorrowfully looked at

the boat that was conveying Him across the lake. In human existence weeping and lamentation are of no use at all, if we do not steadily resolve to acquire that, which we cannot see absent without grief. If these people had stood weeping on the shore, and had gone home despondent, after Jesus had passed out of their sight, their zeal would not have been of the right sort, and would never have enabled them to find Him. Our resolutions are often of this kind; we see that Jesus is no longer beside us; we are in a state of sin calculated to drive Him still further from us, and our resolutions are nothing but mere wishes to be reunited with Him, mere lamentation over our faults. Because we talk a great deal of Jesus and His love we flatter ourselves that we possess really pious zeal; but unless we follow the example of the multitude by the Lake of Galilee, our zeal is unprofitable. They looked after Him, not simply mourning His departure, but in order to see in what direction He was going. Having watched the boat start, they guessed where He would land, and then they made haste to go round the lake. Thus they set us a good example of zeal for Jesus. We ought first to ask: "Where is He? where shall we find Him, in what good work? in what act of self-denial?" And when once we know where He is, in this duty or in that action, or that He demands this or that of us, then let us press forward and follow Him. That is not the time to ask whether it is convenient to us or not—whether it is easy or difficult, our business is to overtake Him. The multitudes of old forgot the necessaries of life in their anxiety to be with Him; and we, too, ought to set aside all earthly advantages, all worldly considerations, if it is a question of being near Him, of clinging to Him and of being faithful. This is true zeal for Jesus Christ, and if we possess it we may be sure that He will never forsake us, but will care for us tenderly.

He cares for those who trust Him. What a consoling truth! How plainly is it revealed to us in to-day's Gospel! And yet experience often seems to point the other way, and those who trust Him appear to be forsaken. But did not the poor, hungry people seem forsaken? Did not our Lord Himself appear to be somewhat embarrassed about them? "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?" Neither Jesus nor His Apostles had money enough to buy bread for so many. This is plain from St. Philip's answer: "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little." And even if the necessary money had been forthcoming, there was not so much bread available, there was only a boy with five barley loaves and two fishes for sale, so that in addition to the want of money, it would have been impossible to buy enough bread. Jesus, instead of consoling the hungry multitude that had followed Him so faithfully, seemed to deprive them of their last hope by acknowledging their pitiful plight, and saying: "Whence shall we buy bread?" Yet He allowed them to realize their helpless condition so thoroughly only that they might be more firmly convinced by the miracle that He was on the point of working. They were to seem forsaken, in order that His love and power might be revealed more gloriously.

It is often thus in the various difficulties and misfortunes of life. So many obstacles and trials present themselves that a man seems hopelessly lost. In many cases he has neither money nor bread, or, in other words, he has no prospect of help; in fact it appears impossible for him to escape from his difficulties and troubles. Moreover, it frequently happens that external misfortunes are accompanied by inward desolation; Jesus seems to have forsaken him. Yet this intense sense of helplessness in many cases is the precursor of wonderful help. Just when all seems lost, our Lord's voice rings

out unexpectedly: "Sit down, ye who are weighed down by misery," —and He comes to give them strength and power.

Jesus said: "Make the men sit down," and there was much grass in the place. We often hear that many who are faithful to Him die in misery without ever experiencing His wonderful help. Has He, therefore, really forsaken them? Is earthly happiness the highest form of happiness? The place where the weary multitude sat down reminds us of that far more glorious abode where those who follow Jesus loyally will some day have their rest. Is earthly misery the most intense that can befall us? Do our Lord's promises all apply to this world? Those crowds of Jews, eager for knowledge, sat on the grass, whilst He stood before them as their Provider, from whom they received food and nourishment. How vividly does this scene represent the glorious future, when all the elect, gathered together as one great family, will rest round Jesus in His Kingdom, receiving from Him the bread of everlasting life and unending happiness.

Then all will be made good, then He will repay us with unspeakable bliss for all that we have suffered for His sake. Therefore let us often renew our resolution to seek Him with holy zeal, and to be faithful to Him until the end; then we shall often experience His wonderful help even in this world, and when in His incomprehensible wisdom He sees fit to withdraw this help, we ought to know that our souls, now hungering after righteousness and thirsting after rest and consolation, will be crowned with all joy in His eternal Kingdom. Amen.

PASSION SUNDAY

"Thou hast set my tears in thy sight, as also in thy promise."—Ps. lv, 9.

God has promised to set our tears in His sight, to come to our assistance when we are in trouble, and to comfort and strengthen us with His grace. We cannot go through life without meeting Jesus on His path of suffering, that is to say, without suffering with our Master, without being convinced of the truth of the words: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matth. xvi, 24). Whenever anything unpleasant, annoying or unfortunate befalls us, we meet, as it were, Jesus carrying His Cross. In such cases we may learn much and derive much comfort from our Lady's sorrow, when she met her Divine Son laden with the Cross on the way to Calvary.

What a night of agony must she have passed after taking leave of Him! She spent the weary hours in weeping, not in sleep, for never for a moment could she forget that He whom she loved most on earth was in the hands of His enemies. It is most painful to witness the agony of those whom we love without being able to alleviate it; and it is almost unbearable suffering not to know what their cruel fate is. Fear and anxiety work upon our imagination, until we picture them enduring the most horrible tortures. How slowly does time pass, how long is every minute, and a night spent in such agonizing fears seems an eternity!

What must have been our Lady's sorrow when she learned that her Divine Son was in the hands of His most bitter enemies, from whose hearts the thirst for His Blood had driven out all human sympathy!

The night at last came to an end, and St. John, the beloved disciple entered, his face pale, his eyes dim with tears, and his voice trembling so that he could hardly utter the terrible words: "Jesus is condemned to death." How different was the message brought by the angelic disciple from that brought years before by the angel! Gabriel greeted our Lady as blessed among women, but St. John greeted her as the most sorrowful Mother. Yet the angel's message was inevitably followed by that of the Apostle, and if we reflect on this fact we shall perceive Mary's real greatness revealed in her answer: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word."

After receiving these tidings she rose up and went out, accompanied by St. John, Mary Magdalen and other holy women. She was determined to witness the fearful sacrifice that her dearly-loved Son was about to offer for the sins of the world. Her motherly heart shrank from the awful sight to be seen in the streets of Jerusalem and before Pilate's tribunal, but her love of Jesus gave her strength and enabled her to endure unspeakable anguish of mind. Standing in the street leading to Calvary, she awaited with dread the coming of her Son. What a spectacle did she behold! As St. Bernard says, she saw Him, not in the glory of His majesty, but overwhelmed by shame, crowned with thorns, stained with blood, driven forward unmercifully by cruel ruffians, abused, ill treated and enfeebled. He cast upon His Mother a look expressive at once of His agony and submission, as if He would say: "Thy loyalty gives me encouragement; stand by me in my sufferings unto the end!" St. Ambrose thinks that our Lord greeted her with the words: "Hail, Mother," and that she replied: "Hail to Thee, my Son." But even if no sound passed their lips, their eyes spoke clearly enough. Their meeting was indeed full of pain, and yet it was full

also of consolation and encouragement. Think of it, whenever anything painful befalls you. Imagine that Jesus is looking at you with love and sorrow, as if He were saying: "Art thou alone in thy suffering? Did I not suffer still more?" Jesus meets you whenever a temptation occurs to lead you astray, and whenever any inclination or passion tends to deceive you and turn you from the right path. He looks at you and says: "I have no dearer wish than that thou shouldst be true to Me." May He meet you when you are in the midst of merriment and happiness; amusement turns so easily to sin, unless our Lord's gentle face, marked by suffering, warns us to use moderation and self-control. For the salvation of your souls I beg you to be always members of that faithful band accompanying our Lady, especially when Jesus is dragged away by His exasperated enemies and forced to bear His Cross. Stay with Mary and with her be true to Jesus, even if men speak against Him, ridicule His teaching and despise our religion and all faithful love of God. He, and he alone, is a true Christian who stands firm in the day of temptation when wrong principles do their best to confuse him, and when adherence to Jesus involves the loss of all earthly happiness.

Let us accustom ourselves to meet our Lord everywhere, *i. e.*, always to remember His holy teaching, in all things to strive to please Him and do His will, and to regard everything as permitted and directed by Him for our welfare. If we do this, Jesus will meet us wherever we go, in all our troubles and anxieties.

Jesus meets us in two ways, as Thomas à Kempis points out—one is the way of promise, and the other the way of consolation.

He meets us with consolation. If any one keeps his eyes fixed upon Jesus in His suffering, if any one in difficult, dangerous and unpleasant circumstances takes Jesus as his example, turning to

Him in childlike, trustful prayer, he will often experience wonderful peace and happiness. Yet sometimes our Master, as He meets us, denies any sensible consolation to our suffering souls, and our hearts remain dry, lonely and tormented by fear and anxiety; we return from prayer with apparently no more comfort than when we had recourse to it.

But when meeting Jesus affords us no consolation, His grace strengthens us through His promises. Prayer may have no perceptible effect upon us, but the thought of our Lord's promises will confirm our resolution to abide by what is right, to press forward without wavering, and not to let our inward dryness make us doubt God's grace, which will never abandon us in our efforts.

Sorrowful as our Lady was when she met Jesus, His glance reminded her of the blessing promised to those who endure unto the end. May she ever be your protectress, that both in joy and sadness you may seek comfort in Jesus only, and even if you feel neither consolation nor pleasure in prayer, doing your duty and striving to do right, the intercession of the holy Mother of Sorrows will obtain for you strength to persevere, reminding you of the grace promised us here, and of the everlasting life awaiting us. May we be guided by Mary's hand until we meet Jesus in eternal happiness. Amen.

PALM SUNDAY

"There stood by the Cross of Jesus His Mother."—John xix, 25.

Never does our Lady appear greater than as she stands by her Divine Son's Cross and watches His agony and death. In all her other sufferings it was only in the figurative sense that she sacrificed herself to the Lord, but here she actually took part in Christ's sacrifice of atonement by her intense sympathy with Him. Here, by suffering with Her Son for us, she became entitled to be our Mother. It is incomprehensible how any one can refuse to venerate Mary and to place implicit confidence in her intercession, after reading the simple words of the Gospel: "There stood by the Cross of Jesus His Mother." If no other fact about her were recorded in the Bible, this one alone would be enough to bind us to her with love and gratitude for having sacrificed herself with Jesus for our sake.

Abraham's sorrow was intense when he had to take his son Isaac up the mountain to sacrifice him there, and his obedience made him glorious under the old dispensation. But he was spared the hardest and most painful task, as he was not allowed to slay his son. No one, however, equalled him in obedience and submission to God until Mary stood by the Cross. She, too, saw her Son carry the wood for the sacrifice up Mount Calvary, she saw Him flung by the executioners upon the Cross; the blows of the hammer drove the nails not only through His hands and feet, but also at the same time through His Mother's tender heart. She watched the men lift up the Cross and let it fall roughly into a hole prepared to receive it;

she beheld Him, the Man of Sorrows, tortured in every part of His body; His head was pierced by thorns, His face disfigured by blows, His parched lips were moistened only with gall; from His hands and feet the Blood dripped down—it was thus that Jesus hung upon the Cross, and by that Cross His Mother stood. Well indeed may the Church exclaim, when contemplating her sorrow: "O, thou Mother, fount of love! Touch my spirit from above, make my heart with thine accord, make me feel as thou hast felt, make my soul to glow and melt, with the love of Christ my Lord."

She is indeed an inexhaustible fount of love, whose love could not be diminished by the most intense agony that she suffered for Jesus' sake. Inexhaustible was her love, too strong to be overcome by the insults and shameful outrages heaped upon her Son. She is the fount of our love of God, since by standing by the Cross she has set us the most beautiful and encouraging example of true, devoted love of Jesus. If we contemplate her, we realize the power of Divine love, and feel ourselves strong to endure everything for love of God, and even to accomplish the hardest tasks. She showed us the power of her love best beside the Cross, for, as Holy Scripture records, she stood by the Cross. It is her steadfast love that we admire in her, and that we ought to learn from her.

The disciples had fled, but she stood fearlessly by the Cross. The Jews might despise her, her Divine Son's enemies might deride her, His poor Mother; they might even in their cruelty kill her, too, out of hatred for Him, but her love was stronger than death. Where were the multitudes who had followed Jesus and greeted Him with cries of "Hosanna"? Where were the crowds whom He had healed and to whom He had brought joy and happiness? Some had been influenced by the prevalent opinion, and had actually joined His enemies, so that they gloated over the wounds of Him who had

healed their wounds, and over the death of One to whom they owed their own life. Others were less ungrateful, but still disloyal. At heart they believed in Him, but had no courage to confess it, and so they hid themselves, mourning in secret; incapable, through weakness of character, to come forward, suffer and die with Him. In comparison with these weak, thankless hearts, how great and strong appears the tender, fearless heart of Mary, faithful unto death. She *stood* by the Cross.

Sorrow threatened to overwhelm her, and unspeakable agony oppressed her, yet she did not sink down in despairing grief—no, she *stood* by the Cross. Tears streamed from her eyes, as if she would fain weep out her very life, but she complained not at what was the will of God, she stood by the Cross; the earth quaked, the graves were opened, the rocks were cleft and the sky grew dark—all the multitude was astounded, the Roman centurion beat his breast with remorse, heaven and earth, men and spirits were all in a state of disturbance, fear and horror—yet, amidst all stood Mary, a glorious example of steadfastness even in the greatest uproar.

Whence did our Lady derive her strength? We have the greater reason to ask this question, because we, too, have urgent need of strength and steadfastness. We have not always friends at hand encouraging us to do right and setting us a good example, and if a time should come when we have to stand alone amongst those who mock at the Cross, when we have no outward support, but are required to hold fast to our faith and morals in opposition to those about us, then we may learn too late that we have been deceiving ourselves and fancying ourselves strong, unless now we take care to acquire the virtue on which our inward strength and faith depend.

Whence, therefore, did our Lady derive her strength? Had she relied upon herself, she would have given way and despaired during

those terrible hours on Calvary; but she had kept nothing back; she had given herself up absolutely to God, and trusting to Him, she stood firm during that time of agony.

Submission to God, reliance upon Him, to have no wish but that His Will be done, to be free from self-love, to make no claim to know better than He does—these are the things that make us strong in hours of trial and give us peace and strength. By submission to God we mean more than mere endurance of the lot assigned us by Him, more than a thoughtless drifting along the stream of life, more than a lazy indifference that believes God will provide; he who really submits to God will always be active, working unwearyingly in the sphere in which he is placed; he will fight, labor, and even die for God's honor. Submission means doing what God wills, and if our work is not successful in spite of our efforts, suffering as God wills. Direct, therefore, all your thoughts, wishes, words and works to God; order your lives in accordance with His will; *stand* always by the Cross. Never yield to ridicule, never fear danger or loss, but *stand* fearlessly by the Cross, although to many that Cross appears only a folly and stumbling-block. Stand by the Cross, and if it proves too hard for you to hold out and endure, have recourse to Mary, the steadfast Mother of Sorrows. She never has allowed any to fall who have relied upon her; may her love be with you, making you brave and strong, steadfast and calm in holy submission to God. Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY

"He is risen, He is not here."—Mark xvi, 6.

Not only to the pious women who went out to embalm the body of Jesus, but also to us and to the whole world did the angel beside the empty tomb announce tidings of the utmost joy: "He is risen, He is not here." These words are in perfect harmony with those sung by the angels at our Lord's birth: "Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." By His resurrection Jesus proved that it was really He, who, for God's honor and peace amongst men, had offered on the Cross the great sacrifice of atonement,—that He was indeed the Redeemer. His resurrection was the seal of our redemption, and therefore Easter is the great festival when we give thanks for all the graces and benefits that we owe to it. "With Him is plentiful redemption";—these words in the psalm are true today of our Lord. When He rose, He showed that death had no power over Him; His resurrection was a triumph over death. Death had come into the world through the devil's malice, because men by sin had put themselves in the power of the evil one; and Jesus, by conquering death, conquered also the devil, who had power over it, and thus by His death He really delivered us from the power of the devil and from the dominion of sin. As St. Paul says, He blotted out the handwriting of the decree against us, fastening it to the Cross (Cf. Col. ii, 14). In His own Blood He washed away our sins, and He suffered both for our sins and for those of the whole world.

Through our Lord's infinite merits, men are now again admitted

to be friends and children of God, and to heaven. Hence the angel's words: "He is risen" remind us that we ought not to let His resurrection be in vain, as far as we are concerned, but we must take part in His redemption, and lead good lives in future, after cleansing our souls from sin by penance. In this way only shall we show true gratitude to Jesus for His resurrection, and in this way only will it be really Easter, not only in the Church, but also in our hearts.

Jesus, having conquered death and the devil, through His infinite merits has power to help us in our long struggle against sin and evil.

In thought stand by the empty tomb whenever the tempter whispers to you: "It is too hard for weak mortals to avoid this or that sin." Your Saviour, who once lay in the tomb, is with you, if you earnestly desire it, and ready to give you strength. Nothing that He asks can be too hard for those whom He redeemed, since He died in order to obtain for them the powerful assistance of God.

A pagan may say it is too hard to do right, because his religion gives him no help; an unbeliever may say it is too hard, because his intellect, though he may value it very highly, is unable to withstand the fury of his passions; but a Christian cannot say it is too hard, when he is called upon to obey Christ's commandments with his Redeemer's help.

Ask all the saints, who relied so firmly upon their risen Saviour, what would have been too hard for them. The world is amazed at their virtues, which in a heathen age would have been deemed unattainable; they accomplished what appeared to be far beyond the power of mankind, and led an angelic life in their Saviour's strength.

We are told that our Lord's tomb was in a garden, and from the moment when it was opened, blossoms and fruits, virtues and good

works, such as had never been seen before, have abounded on earth. Christ has redeemed us, too; let us, too, be willing to be guided by His grace; let us thankfully, by His assistance, practise virtue and good works, and not surrender to cowardice, lukewarmness and indolence under the pretext that what He requires is too hard. He has risen and redeemed us; He has proved by His resurrection that His doctrine is true, for again and again He foretold to His disciples that He would rise again, but they did not understand Him, for His words were hard to comprehend. Therefore, He proved that the hardest doctrine which He ever taught was true, thus proving the truth of all the rest. Like a bright light this doctrine flashes forth over the whole world from the tomb of our risen Lord, and what was its effect? It swept away all the superstitions of idolatry, all the horrors by means of which men thought to honor their false gods; Christ's teaching was for all mankind; it was not restricted to a few favored individuals; even a very ignorant Catholic knows more about God and our salvation than hundreds of learned men would have known in pagan times. The life of whole nations is permeated by the doctrines of Christianity, their moral standard has been raised, their modes of thought changed, and their ideas and actions sanctified. So deep was the impression made upon the whole of civilized existence by the doctrines of our own risen Lord, that at the present time those who in their ingratitude refuse to believe in Him are nevertheless, without being aware of it, influenced by His Spirit. Whatever good they do, or teach, is due to Christianity, without which they would never have known many truths that they regard as matters of intellect.

Let us thank our risen Saviour for His teaching and for the precious gift of redemption. Let us beware of trying to bring His doctrines into agreement with our passions, or to interpret them

according to our perverse minds; what He taught, we will believe, now and for ever, and thus we shall reach heaven, our final goal.

Jesus is risen, He has redeemed us, and so we are destined for heaven. What encouragement does this truth contain! Without it life would, indeed, be cold and hopeless. Without redemption we should not know why we were sent into this world to undergo so many troubles during our short span of life, nor why we should be encompassed on all sides with sorrows. Life has no meaning for one who does not believe in the redemption, but in its light life appears full of significance and importance. In the light of the redemption we see that life is the narrow way, often painful and perplexing, leading up to heaven, if we are guided by the hand of our risen Saviour. We were created not for this brief life on earth, but for eternity, to which we may attain through Jesus Christ. Let us therefore thank Him to-day for all the graces of redemption, that He ratified by His Resurrection. Let us avoid sin, resolving firmly to do what is right and faithfully to follow out His teaching. Let us live, not for earth, but for heaven. This should be our thankoffering to Him to-day on the feast of His Resurrection, our thankoffering for His abundant redemption. Amen.

LOW SUNDAY

"Thomas answered and said to Him: 'My Lord and my God.'"—John xx, 28.

In commenting on to-day's gospel, St. Gregory says very beautifully: "Do you think that it happened accidentally that the Apostle Thomas was first absent, and, after he came, heard; and having heard, doubted; and having doubted, touched; and by touching obtained faith?" No, all this did not happen accidentally, but by the grace of God; for in a very wonderful way God in His mercy allowed the wounds of our unbelief to be healed by the Apostle who, because he doubted, touched the actual marks of His Divine Master's wounds. St. Thomas, by his want of faith, did more towards helping us to believe than did the other Apostles by their faith, since he was brought back to faith by touch, and this fact encourages us to cast aside all doubt and strengthens our faith. Therefore, our Lord permitted this disciple to doubt after the Resurrection, but He did not let him continue to do so. He wished Thomas to be a witness to the truth of the Resurrection, because, in consequence of his doubts, he actually touched the marks of our Saviour's wounds.

People might have been inclined to think that the Apostles' credulity led them to deceive themselves, or to be deceived, regarding the Resurrection, had it not been impossible even to suspect St. Thomas of credulity. He said: "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." But afterwards, being thoroughly convinced, he threw himself at Christ's feet, exclaiming: "My Lord and my God." Surely only one unwill-

ing to believe could still refuse to admit the truth of the Resurrection! Thomas cried: "My Lord";—Thou art here Thyself; it is no illusion of my excited imagination, no ghost, no apparition resembling Thee that I behold; Thou art here, with the same body which suffered the torture of the Cross and the agony of death. "My God."—From the very fact that Thou art Thyself present, I know Thee, Jesus, to be indeed my God.—Thus spoke St. Thomas, and thus we, too, should speak with him.

Through Christ's Resurrection we recognize His divinity. The truth, so often and so plainly proclaimed, that He was God, was confirmed by all His miracles, for God would certainly never give one, who spoke untruths, power to work miracles. It is impossible for God, being all holy, to confirm falsehoods by miracles. Therefore, our Lord's miracles in general are a proof of His Divinity, but His Resurrection is the greatest and most glorious of them all; for Christ rose from the dead by His own power. He was not raised by some higher authority. By rising again He proved the truth of the words: "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it up again; as the Father hath life in Himself, even so hath He granted to the Son to have life in Himself. I am the Resurrection and the Life." Every creature has life, not of itself, but given to it by its Creator; God alone has life in Himself; consequently Jesus is God. This doctrine of our Lord's Divinity is a fundamental doctrine in Christianity, and denial of it involves a denial of Christianity as a whole; for to deny that Jesus is God involves a denial that He spoke the truth, when He declared Himself to be God indeed, the Son of the Almighty Father. Let us always hold fast to this sacred truth, which is confirmed by the strongest proofs. Everything,—all our faith and all our virtue—depends upon our belief in the Divinity of Christ.

Jesus is truly God. Of what avail is the learning of men, profound and attractive as it may appear? Every man, however wise, is not only capable of error, but does actually err in many respects.

History teaches us this truth; for we read of great men who have propounded famous theories, universally accepted and believed, and yet in course of time the errors underlying them have revealed themselves, and the theories have gradually been discarded, giving place to others, more recently put forward; until at last the mention of these men and their doctrines is enough to remind us how easy it is to make mistakes. We should indeed be in a sad plight had we to rely exclusively upon human learning. We should have no firm foothold, but only a fear of being compelled to deny to-morrow what to-day appears true, and to curse what to-day seems most sacred. But, as it is, we rely not on the doctrines of men, but on the teaching of Him who, by His Resurrection, proved Himself to be God. What can make us waver in our faith? Nothing, for what we believe is the word of the eternal, unchanging Truth, and His doctrines are as true now as they were in the past and as they will be forever. Heaven and earth may pass away, but His words can never pass away.

Jesus is truly God. This truth strengthens us to do right. Even if men could teach infallibly what is right and true, their teaching would be of no avail, since the fairer the colors in which they depicted virtue, the more painfully should we recognize our inability to attain to it, as they could not impart to us strength to do right. But He who teaches us is truly God, the Bestower of grace, the support of our souls, the vine of which we are the branches, and the strength of our hearts, without whom we can do nothing, and with whom we can do all things. God Himself helps us to accomplish what He would have us do. How consoling and encouraging is this

doctrine! Whoever recognizes Christ as truly God, can never cease to strive after perfection, knowing that he will not strive in vain, as, by aid of the grace given by our risen Saviour, it is possible for him to advance daily on the way of salvation.

My Lord and my God! In Thy Resurrection I recognize Thee as my true God, whose teaching and grace are given me for my salvation. Throughout my life I will acknowledge Thee as my God, by the firmness of my faith and perseverance in doing what is right. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

"I am the good shepherd."—John x, 14.

By his Resurrection our Lord proved Himself to be our Redeemer, and we are reminded of this fact in to-day's gospel, where He stated it plainly; for, by calling Himself the Good Shepherd, He referred to the fulfillment in His own person of many prophecies, because Isaias, Jeremias and Ezechiel had all announced the Redeemer as a good shepherd. Our Lord implied by His words that He was the Messias foretold by the prophets, and that He proved it by being in very truth a good shepherd. If He is the Good Shepherd, it must be our duty to acknowledge Him as such, and to follow His voice; in fact He meant us to understand this from the words: "I know Mine (*i. e.*, my sheep), and Mine know Me."

We recognize Him as the Good Shepherd by His *zeal* in teaching us, feeding us, as it were, with the words of Divine truth. Throughout His whole life He strove incessantly to make known to us the eternal truths that we should never have learnt without Him, and that are necessary to enable us to find the right way of salvation.

When as a boy, twelve years of age, He allowed the light of His wisdom to shine forth in the Temple at Jerusalem, He showed His intense eagerness to announce the Divine revelation to men, and the same zeal was displayed in all its fullness when, at the age of thirty, He entered upon His public ministry. It never diminished, from the time when He first began to teach, to the hour of His death, and it gave Him no rest. He did not weary of travelling up and down throughout the whole of Judea, preaching everywhere the newly revealed word of God. Hunger and thirst, heat and cold,

and the difficulties of the way had no power to deter Him. He taught all day long, and even by night there came to Him some who, like Nicodemus, were seeking salvation, but feared openly to confess their faith in Him. In spite of the weakness of their faith, our Lord devoted to them the hours of sleep, that He might arouse them from the sleep of sin, and bring them out of the darkness of ignorance to the light of a true knowledge of God. Neither amidst the merry-making at the marriage at Cana, nor in His agony on the Cross did He ever cease teaching. He showed Himself to be the Good Shepherd, by the ardent zeal with which He expounded to us men our holy faith, and we show our recognition of Him as the Good Shepherd when we do our best to learn of Him and to impress His holy doctrines, not only upon memory, but upon our hearts. We show our recognition of Him if the knowledge of salvation that He proclaimed is more precious to us than any other form of knowledge, and if, like St. Paul, we can say that we desire above all things to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Let us, therefore, beg the Good Shepherd to give us the gift of faith, to make us delight in His holy word, to help us to live in accordance with it, and to be unwearied in carrying out His teaching, as He was unwearied in instructing us.

Jesus was the Good Shepherd, and proved it by the *compassion* that He felt for all mankind. He grieved at seeing how many had gone astray and were lost by their own fault, and He left His heavenly home because men had turned aside from it, for in His compassion He longed to lead them back thither.

The Good Shepherd felt compassion also with the temporal sufferings of men; His Heart was full of sympathy for all in sorrow; He was ever ready to comfort the afflicted and to heal the sick. As long as He lived on earth, He took upon Himself all the needs, trials and

sufferings of mankind, and even now, although He dwells in heaven, He is still the Good Shepherd, full of the tenderest sympathy, regarding all our griefs as His own. He stated this expressly when He declared that at the Last Judgment He would say: "I was poor, sick, a prisoner, hungry and thirsty." He accepts all that we do to help our neighbors in their necessities as if we had done it to Himself, and it is His will that we should see Him in every sufferer. There can be no greater sympathy than this, and if we are convinced that He, the Good Shepherd, is filled with compassion for us, we cannot fail to trust Him most completely, and we shall never be impatient or murmur against God, for we shall know that Jesus is aware of our troubles, and if He, in spite of His compassion, does not help us at once, it must be because He sees that our suffering tends to our eternal salvation. We ought never to despond, as if we were forsaken, for our good and compassionate Shepherd is always looking down upon us from heaven. Men may forsake us, but He will never do so. Let us, therefore, beseech Him to give us real confidence in His help, so that, whatever may happen to us, we may hold fast to Him. Let us ask Him never to let us abandon Him, our truest Friend, who is incapable of deceiving us, and let us show, by our trust in His compassion, that we know Him to be our Good Shepherd.

Jesus was the Good Shepherd, and proved it by the *mercy* with which He welcomed sinners, rebuking them gently, arousing contrition in their hearts, and finally forgiving their sins, when in humility and sorrow they cast themselves at His feet. Mary Magdalen, Zachæus, the man sick of the palsy, and the penitent thief on the Cross all recognized Him as the Good Shepherd; in short, every one did so to whom He said: "Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee." From the time of His Ascension to the present day, how many millions

have received God's grace, peace of mind and a claim to heaven through the power of forgiving sins, which He bestowed upon the Apostles! All these millions, with heartfelt joy and gratitude, have recognized Him as their Good Shepherd. Let us do the same. Let us, too, reflect how far we have gone astray in our sins, and that, when we are off the right path, far from Him, death lies in wait for us; let us make a good confession and so return to Him; He will forgive us and sustain us by His grace on the way to everlasting life. He will lead us, as it were, to good pastures, along paths by which our souls will gain strength to do right, and grow more worthy of heaven.

Jesus was the Good Shepherd, and His *infinite love*, revealed in His whole life, bore witness to the fact. It was as the Good Shepherd in infinite love that He came down to earth at Christmas; as the Good Shepherd He went about doing good; as the Good Shepherd He ascended to heaven, and, still as the Good Shepherd, He sits at the right hand of the Father, watching over us and loving us. If only we recognize Him as the Good Shepherd, our hearts will be filled with love of Him. "I know My sheep and My sheep know Me." This can mean nothing but: "I love My sheep and My sheep love Me." Let us ask Him to give us the true love of Him, which manifests itself in ready service, in willingness to obey, in suffering and enduring all things gladly, and in laboring to please Him. As long as we are in this world, our love for the Good Shepherd will not of course secure to us the sensation of perfect happiness; it will require us to undertake many tasks repugnant to us, but this must not prevent us from loving Him with all our hearts, for it was by undergoing so many great hardships and trials for our sake, that He proved Himself to be the Good Shepherd who really loved His flock.

Let us, therefore, bear with patience the various mortifications that the struggle to do right involves, remembering that our Good Shepherd, whilst on earth, renounced the joys of this world. Let us not be led astray by temptations, however hard it may be to overcome them; our Good Shepherd out of love of us allowed Himself to be tempted and taught us how to triumph over the tempter. Let us pay no attention if others ridicule or despise us on account of our efforts to love and serve our Lord; He, the Good Shepherd, endured persecution and scorn for our sake. However hard we have to toil and labor on the path of duty and virtue, let us never complain that our burden is too heavy, since Jesus, our Good Shepherd, thought no work and no exertion too great, if it was to do us good. Let us ask Him to enable us to show in our lives that we acknowledge Him as our Good Shepherd, by following His most holy example and shrinking from no trials and difficulties that may fall to our lot, if we really love Him. Jesus is the Good Shepherd,—let us put all our faith and hope in Him; let Him be the love of our hearts. He is the Good Shepherd; let us turn to Him with true contrition for our sins; let us follow Him, confessing Him before men, consecrating all our life to His service and working constantly for Him to the hour of our death. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

"A little while and now you shall not see me."—John xvi, 16.

In the Gospel that we read to-day our Lord foretold to the Apostles His approaching death, and their hearts were filled with sorrow at the thought of soon losing Him. He comforted them, however, by assuring them that they would see Him again ere long, because after three days He would rise from the dead in order to ascend to heaven. For a short time the Apostles were to lose Him, and after a short time they were to see Him again. Everything here on earth, whether sorrowful or joyful, lasts but a little while. We ought to take this truth to heart, for it conduces to our eternal salvation.

The life of man is short, and, as the Psalmist says, passes away like a breath. When we look forward to the future and make plans in our imagination, life seems long, but year follows year in rapid succession, and soon the man who looked forward to a long future has to look back upon a long past. He has grown old unawares; he is on the brink of the grave and cannot account for the years that are past. An old man, however long he may have lived, thinks that his life has been short; and yet, as he looks back, he seems to see here and there the graves of those with whom he once lived, played, worked, suffered and quarrelled. All have gone before him, and life, so short in itself, was shorter still in their case. We do not know whether our companions to-day will look back on our graves or not. Whether we are to die first, or to outlive them, life is always short, and it behooves us to make a good

use of it. *The time of youth is short.* How soon does it become too late to make good all that has been neglected in one's early years! There is no need of death to convince us of this fact; it is enough to reach a more advanced age. Negligence in training the hearts and minds of the young often makes them incapable of doing right in later years. The short period of youth often decides whether the rest of life is to be happy or miserable. Remember that, as you grow older, it will be useless to lament over the time wasted in your youth, and that all such lamentations are nothing but so many charges brought against yourselves. It is sad to have to confess: "I am to blame for all my misfortunes; I would not listen to any well-meant advice or warning; I wasted every opportunity of doing right; I threw away all my youth and with it my whole life." You should often renew your resolution by God's grace to spend your youth in doing your best to acquire training in piety and in useful work.

Life is short, and short too, are all our efforts to do much good and to adhere firmly to what is right. It is often a hard matter to do right, and it is no easy task to persevere and to accomplish this or that good work. But our efforts will not last forever, and the days of toil, exertion and struggle pass, and when they are gone we shall indeed be happy if we can say to ourselves: "By that short struggle to please God I have won eternal merit and a reward that will never perish." Many people tell us that life is short, and therefore we ought to enjoy it while it lasts; but this is a foolish remark, for what they call enjoying life is really frittering it away unprofitably. Just because life is short we ought to work with redoubled energy and try to lay up a store of everlasting merit. Just because life is short we ought to suffer with redoubled patience whatever trials God sends us. In time of sorrow let us never for-

get that the hour of agony will pass. The days of our Lord's Passion, death and burial passed, and what had gone before added to the glory of His Resurrection. Under every cross, if it is to win us merit, we ought to call to mind the words: "You now indeed have sorrow, but . . . your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you" (John xvi, 22).

Life is short, and it would be the height of folly to cling to it. Of course we may enjoy the good things and pleasures of this world, for God gives them to us in His incomprehensible kindness, but it behooves a Christian to act, as St. Paul says, and delight in the things of earth as if he did not delight, *i. e.*, he ought never to set his heart upon them; he may make use of whatever is permitted, not becoming a slave to it, but always thinking of what is eternal. Whoever clings too much to the pleasures and joys of this world is preparing for himself a very sad and painful departure from them; for everything here lasts but a short time, and sooner or later he will have to give up all to which he is now attached.

Whoever sets his heart on the things of this world must look forward to a sorrowful death, for the more his heart clings to earth, the more painful will be the wrench, when, after a little while, God requires his soul of him. Life is short, and yet this short time is often long enough for us to insult God by committing many grievous sins. In a short time we earn for ourselves an eternity of pain. How foolish this is! The pleasure afforded by sin lasts so short a time, and yet we prefer it to everlasting happiness. When we are tempted to sin, let us ask ourselves what it will profit us to enjoy a deceptive happiness in sin for a few moments, hours, days or even years. The excitement of sin soon ceases, the false dream vanishes, and nothing remains but unending misery and lamentation. Time is short, therefore let us live mind-

ful of eternity. Let us lift up our hearts above what is earthly and temporal; and as time swiftly passes, let us pray to Him, who never changes, to give us grace to keep from sin and to make us persevere in what is right. Then we, too, shall be able to say with joy: "You will see me no more, because I go to the Father." Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

"Now I go to Him that sent me, and none of you asketh me: 'Whither goest Thou?'"—John xvi, 5.

Our Lord announced to His disciples the approaching completion of His work of redemption. "Now I go to Him that sent me,"—I am about to die, and after My death I shall return to My Father, rejoicing at having accomplished the work which I was sent into the world to do. You do not realize that this fulfilment of My task is fraught with happiness for you; you are only sad because I am leaving you, and therefore you do not ask whither I am going; you do not consider that I shall be in heaven where I am destined, as Man and Redeemer, to sit at My Father's right hand and make intercession for you.

As Man and Redeemer Jesus has fulfilled His destiny, and how much this ought to encourage us to attain to ours!

Many people live on, year after year, without ever asking: "Whither are we going? What is our allotted task?" It is, however, man's privilege to know what his task is, and to exert his free will in order to accomplish it. We ought always to keep our end in view, so that each day, hour and minute of our life may carry us onward towards the glorious goal for which we were created. We are destined for an eternity of happiness. "God will have all men to be saved" (I. Tim. ii, 4), says the Apostle, and the happiness that we are to enjoy is so great that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him" (I. Cor. ii, 9). For such eternal happiness it is surely worth while to abandon and renounce the trifling delights of this world, in as far as they are

sinful. If we could see heaven and all the joys awaiting us there, we should ask ourselves, "Why do you care so much about what appears pleasant on earth? Why are you discontented when things here do not go according to your desires? Cannot you do without a few things and deny yourself a little for the sake of obtaining such unspeakable bliss? The pleasure that sin affords is a pitiful thing, soon passing away and leaving behind it nothing but remorse and shame, and would you barter for it an eternity of happiness? Your love of comfort, your lukewarmness and indolence are mean, miserable things. Why do you care nothing for your everlasting rest? You think more of a despicable piece of selfishness, or a ridiculous display of vanity, or even of indulgence in bad temper, than you do of the joys of heaven. You fancy that it is impossible to resist this or that craving, and no sooner have you yielded to it than you feel, with bitter sorrow, that you have forfeited Paradise for a brief, deceptive pleasure. Would that heaven and all its joys, would that the happiness for which we are destined, were ever before our eyes! We should not sin so recklessly, or yield so readily to earth's allurements, but we should here in this world enjoy peace of mind and a good conscience.

We are destined, as St. Paul says, one day to see God face to face, and to know even as we are known, but we shall never be worthy to behold Him, unless even now the most ardent desire of our heart is to know Him aright. Faith teaches us to know God, and without faith no one can hope to go to heaven. May our faith remain sacred to us until we draw our last breath. May all that we learn and experience be regarded by us in the light of faith, *i. e.*, may we refer it all to God, and employ it in learning to know Him better. Let us never waver in our faith, and never be infected with the spirit of worldliness, which cares for everything

but God. Let us cherish a firm and steadfast faith in God, for thus we shall become worthy one day to behold Him and, as the Apostle says, to enjoy Him, to find unspeakable happiness in loving Him whose love alone is able fully to satisfy the heart of man. This is man's destiny, this is the highest possible bliss, but this love must at least begin on earth, for only a heart that has lived *for* God in this world will live *in* Him in the world to come.

Love of God is displayed in obedience to Him. The better we love Him, the more ready and joyful will be our obedience. If He one day asks us whether we had loved Him on earth, we shall answer with gladness proportionate to the humility and fidelity with which we have done our duty, to the number of good works that we have performed, and to the amount of self-restraint that we have practised out of love of Him. The genuineness of our love will be proved in this way and by the solidity of the virtues that we have acquired; not by the number of fine speeches that we have made, or of pious books that we have read. We ought to love God not only in word and with our emotions, but in deed and in truth. We are destined some day to join the company of those blessed spirits, who stand before the throne and never cease their worship of God. Let us now prepare ourselves to fulfil this glorious duty by means of prayer, for prayer alone will furnish us with the grace of faith, will strengthen us to disregard the things of earth and to overcome temptations to sin, and will help us to be faithful in good works. Thoughtful prayer, proceeding from hearts earnestly desirous of salvation, brings us even now closer to God, and will some day unite us for ever with Him. Therefore let us pray without ceasing, as the Apostle bids us, but pray with a heart full of good will really to accomplish the task, for which our prayer obtains us strength.

We know whither our Lord has gone; He is in heaven, preparing a place for us. We know, too, whither He wishes us to go—also to heaven, to be happy with Him for ever. When in the commonplace round of our everyday life we are tempted to forget our high calling, let us ask ourselves, "Whither ought I to go?" The answer will be, "To heaven, by faith, avoidance of sin, a life of virtue and incessant prayer." Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

"Amen, amen, I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in my name, He will give it you."—John xvi, 23.

The first three days of this week are the Rogation days, when the Church reminds us to pray particularly for the crops of all kinds, and to pray more especially that the fruit of good works may abound in our hearts. Let us be zealous in prayer on these holy days and ask God for all that is necessary and conducive to the general welfare and also to our own welfare and the salvation of our souls. Not only during these three days, but always, ought we to bear in mind our Lord's comforting doctrine that holy Church impresses upon us by means of the Rogation days: "If you ask the Father anything in my name, He will give it you." There can be nothing more consoling in all circumstances, and whenever we are in need of anything, than the certainty that we may go to God and ask Him for what we want in the name of Jesus, and for the merits of His dearly loved Son, and, provided it is really for our good, we are sure to obtain it. Our request is granted through Christ's infinite merits, but it behooves us, too, to do our best to be worthy of having our prayers heard.

If our prayers are to be granted, we must pray *with confidence*, relying upon God's infinite wisdom, mercy and power, and trusting to the infinite efficacy of Christ's merits. This confidence must be heartfelt. Whenever we read the holy Gospels we see what great favors our Lord bestowed upon those who really trusted Him, when they called upon Him. All sorts of people came to Him—the blind, the dumb, and those who had suffered for years from in-

curable diseases; humanly speaking there seemed to be no hope of cure for such as these, but they asked with confidence, not doubting or wavering; they prayed, being fully convinced of our Lord's merciful kindness and power, and it was with joy that they received the assurance that their prayer was granted: "Be of good cheer, my son, my daughter; thy faith, thy heartfelt confidence hath made thee whole."

Our prayers are often far too cold and too mechanical, and in the depths of our heart we are too apt to give way to cowardly doubts, and so we have no right to expect to be heard.

Our confidence ought to be *simple and childlike.* Let us not forget that our Lord said: "Let the little ones come unto me!" Childlike simplicity is only too often absent from our prayers, and, in the blindness and obstinacy of our hearts, we try to dictate to God, instead of simply asking Him for what we want. We require Him to act in some particular way, and to help us as we think best. We are often not heard, because there is no humility and no real submission to God's Will in our prayers. We ought to pray like little children, asking God to do what in His love and wisdom He sees best, although we may think otherwise, and then our prayers are sure to be heard, and we shall obtain what is really good for us.

Our confidence ought to be *lively,* for life is displayed in activity, and where there is no movement there is death. Hence lively confidence makes us work as well as pray. With regard to temporal matters, most people see that it would be useless to pray for our daily bread if we did not work for it, and useless to pray for knowledge and wisdom if we did not exert ourselves to learn; but with regard to the higher gifts of grace it is not everyone who understands that he must do his best to secure them, and not only pray for them. Many ask forgiveness without giving a thought to

true contrition; many pray for amendment of life, without making the least attempt to improve. They would be pleased if, by means of a miracle, God were suddenly to take away from their hearts all tendency to sin; but they are not willing to be watchful, and to deny and conquer themselves. The prayers of such people seem to imply that God ought to prevent them from perishing when they rush into occasions of sin, and that He ought to make them more pious and virtuous in the midst of the bad company which they have no intention of forsaking. They make it impossible for their prayers to be heard, and when at last they see that they are sinners, devoid of all grace, they blame God for it, saying: "I have prayed a great deal, and all my prayers have been useless. Henceforth I will give up prayer altogether." Prayers, unaccompanied by honest effort, and made without confidence, are indeed of no value; but you ought to give up praying in this way and offer instead a prayer full of good will, which will penetrate not only to the heights of heaven, but also into the depths of your own heart, and impel it to act, to struggle, and to overcome.

Our confidence ought to be *lasting*, and then we shall have the joy of knowing that our persevering prayers have been heard. Man in his impetuosity wishes to carry everything by storm. He hears or reads of some virtue to-day, and wants to possess it perfectly to-morrow. Yet all things in the world grow slowly; growth is sure, though unseen. Continue to pray, even though it may seem that it is impossible for you to improve; you will gain strength imperceptibly, and at last, perhaps after many years, you will be able honestly and without vanity to say: "I have made progress." The same applies to everything for which you pray. Do not fancy that you need only ask for a thing, and will at once receive it in full perfection. You must continue to have confidence in God;

when you imagine that your prayers have been of no avail, they may have effected very much, only the time has not yet come for you to see the fulfilment of your request. The harvest, that we see in the summer, lies for a long time in the earth as seed; no one can look at it, no one knows what is going on, but some secret force is acting upon and in the buried grains. God's fatherly eye is watching over them, and His hand is giving them life; God works where no man can perceive His action; only persevere in prayer.

If our confidence is lasting, our prayer will rise up to God every day, and our morning and night prayers should be golden chains, binding us indissolubly to heaven, and drawing us up whenever in the course of our everyday life we sink down in the dust of this world.

As long as life lasts let us persevere in prayer, being full of heartfelt, childlike, simple, living and lasting confidence; let us pray, trusting absolutely in the merits of Jesus Christ, and then some day in heaven we shall realize the fulfilment of our Lord's promise: "If you ask the Father anything in My Name, He will give it you." Amen.

THE SUNDAY AFTER THE ASCENSION

"But when the Paraclete cometh, whom I will send you from the Father, . . . He shall give testimony of me."—John xv, 26.

In to-day's Gospel our Lord tells His Apostles that they must not expect honor, authority, riches, or the goods and pleasures of this world as a reward of their faith, but, on the contrary, He reveals to them a future full of hardships, contempt and persecution for His sake. He is, however, unwilling to leave them as orphans in the world, so, after foretelling much that is painful, He promises them sweet and sure consolation. "When the Paraclete, the Comforter, cometh, whom I will send you from the Father, He shall give testimony of me." The Holy Ghost is a Comforter to all Christians, and not only to the Apostles. Even although we are not called upon to suffer what they did, if we try to lead a really good life on earth, it will be full of trials and difficulties.

St. Paul tells us, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II. Tim. iii, 12); but, provided that we hold fast to the Holy Ghost and His grace, we shall never be without some consolation, such as the world is unable to supply, in all the circumstances of life. The Holy Ghost alone can give the only true kind of consolation in the matter that most concerns our eternal salvation. He alone can comfort us by forgiving our sins, when we confess them.

The world has no power to comfort us when we have sinned. If it suggests that God will not judge us harshly, owing to His goodness and mercy, our own reason and faith should prevent our accepting this consolation, for they tell us with absolute certainty, "Yes, God is good and merciful, but He is also just."

Sometimes the world acknowledges that we ought to make reparation for our sins, and so it devises works of penance, and the heathen also have inflicted upon themselves fearful and yet absurd tortures in order to appease the anger of God; yet we can derive no consolation from such self-imposed penalties, for the question inevitably presents itself: "Can *we* determine the conditions on which God, when offended, will forgive us? Must not He decide what we ought to do to make atonement?"

If the world seeks to distract us and make us forget our sins by dragging us into the vortex of earthly pleasures and amusements, there can be no true consolation in thus stifling the voice of conscience. For a time we may forget it, but sooner or later the hour will come when we shall remember our sins, and they will disturb and torture our minds, so that no earthly pleasure and no amount of gaiety will ever allay our fears. If we were left to ourselves and the world, the thought of our own sinfulness would embitter a life otherwise happy, and what misery would await us at death! We can never be grateful enough to our Lord for the Holy Ghost, the true comforter that He has sent us. He consoles us in the Sacrament of Penance whenever we receive it worthily; He comforts us for the sake of Jesus Christ, who, in accordance with the will of His heavenly Father, made satisfaction for us by His bitter Passion and death.

For Christ's sake our sins are really forgiven. Before confession our hearts are burdened with the consciousness of guilt and with the load of sin that we have laid upon our conscience, but after it they are light and joyful. We seem to have cast aside a burden, to have for ever done with a sorrowful past, so that we are, as it were, born again, looking towards a happier future. Nothing can afford so much consolation as the forgiveness of our sins, which

brings with it the great joy that we are now not merely *called* God's children, but *are* such in deed and in truth. Let us, whenever we go to Confession, pray the Holy Ghost to give us this comfort, and let us receive the holy Sacrament of Penance with a good will, honestly and with contrition.

But when we have been restored to a state of grace, through the Comforter, it behooves us to remain in it by avoiding sin and doing right in future. The thought of this duty distresses us, for our tendency to sin is very strong, and we are very weak; our hindrances in the right way are many, and our power of endurance is but slight. How little is the world able to help us, when it is a question of doing what is good, and of avoiding what is evil! It can only give us a number of fine maxims, of eloquent words and well-meant counsels. These serve very well and are quite satisfactory as long as we feel in our hearts no temptation and no passionate desire to disregard them. But when the storm of passion is aroused, the fine words are of no avail, and are quickly forgotten. When temptation rages within us, and in our anxiety we think it impossible to withstand the evil one, what is the use of all the beautiful maxims that we read in worldly books? They vanish like soap bubbles, and at the moment of temptation we are exposed to sin, helpless and without comfort. The wisdom of the world can give us no consolation, none can help us save the Spirit sent us by the Eternal Word, for He supplies us with grace and strength. At the hour when we have to fight the good fight, He is with us, reminding us that what to us is impossible becomes possible by His aid. Let us hold fast to His gracious consolation and consoling grace; and then we shall succeed in doing what is right and in overcoming evil.

Let us therefore to-day have recourse to the Holy Ghost, asking

Him to work in and with us. Let us promise to co-operate with Him to the best of our ability, and then we need have no fear of stumbling on the way of salvation, of abandoning what is good or of plunging into the abyss of destruction. May the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, guide us all safely to eternal comfort and eternal salvation. Amen.

PENTECOST

"When the days of Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together in one place."—Acts ii, 1.

Our chief task in life is to love Jesus, and for love of Him to keep His commandments, and our reward is that He comes to us and dwells in us by His grace. We can see how this was the case with the first Christian community in Jerusalem, the members of which aimed at nothing but at loving Jesus and at proving their love by works performed under very great difficulties. It was the case, too, with the holy Apostles, and St. Luke has recorded how lovingly they labored in spite of much suffering.

The earliest Christian community after our Lord's ascension assembled in one large room. There were about 120 people present, including our Lady and several other women. Tradition tells us that they had gathered together to pray in the same room where Jesus had presided at the last supper, and where the Apostles had subsequently chosen Matthias to take the place of Judas, the traitor.

How beautiful and edifying a sight must this assembly of Christians have presented! All were inspired by the same love, the same faith and the same zeal in prayer. There was no pride, no self-esteem, no vanity; all were full of humility, desiring only to receive the Holy Ghost, and by the aid of His grace to lead a life fruitful in good works. There was no rivalry, no jealousy, no envy and no hatred amongst them, but all were united in mutual love, striving to please God and to love Jesus and be loved by Him. There was no indifference, no lukewarmness and no in-

dolence; the example of each encouraged his neighbor and stimulated him to fresh fervor. All were praying earnestly to Jesus, beseeching Him to send them the Holy Ghost, that they might have wisdom and power to hold fast to their holy faith themselves, and to make it known to others, either by word of mouth, or by the quiet, modest force of example. Such an assembly of men and women eager for salvation certainly deserved that the Holy Ghost should come down upon them, pouring out the abundance of His grace.

Now, as then in Jerusalem, united effort on the part of many to attain to what is good brings down the grace of the Holy Spirit upon whole congregations, and, as a consequence of the Communion of saints, the noblest work that Christians can accomplish, provided that they are men of good will, is to promote not only their own salvation, but also that of others, by prayer and a good example. Therefore you may take that gathering of Christians as a model; Jesus has gathered you together here, and certainly, if you continue to be men and women of good will, His holy Mother will be with you as your Mother, just as she then occupied the place of honor in the midst of the early Christians. Jesus has gathered you together here that you may prepare yourselves by prayer and love, revealing itself practically in the discharge of your daily duties, for the work of being useful also to others and of leading them to salvation. May you all therefore strive with one accord, with the same zeal and the same love of God, to attain this end. Each one should pray for the others, as the first Christians did, encouraging and setting them a good example, and you should be of one accord in despising all that is wrong, dishonorable, mean and sinful. The Holy Ghost will not withhold His grace if you exert yourselves; He will enlighten your hearts more and more

with the light of faith and of true knowledge; He will make you enthusiastic for what is really good, and will equip you with Christian prudence, with a gentle but steadfast disposition, and with that inward peace that alone can preserve you from a sinful and despairing quest of false peace. If men had continued in that unity of faith, confidence and love, which our Lord desired His disciples to have, they would have escaped much misery, many horrible episodes in history would never have occurred, and the still more dreadful sense of discord and degradation that weighs down the hearts of many at the present day would be unknown. It was to do good to the entire world that the Holy Ghost came down at Pentecost upon the Apostles and all assembled with them in that room at Jerusalem; for it was through that descent of the Holy Ghost that the Catholic Church was founded, and it is her mission to give to all men peace, such as the world cannot bestow. The Holy Ghost came down upon the Apostles on the Jewish festival of Pentecost, because that particular festival was a type of what He was to effect under the new Dispensation. The Jewish Pentecost, instituted by the Mosaic law, was also called the Feast of Weeks, because it was celebrated seven weeks after the Pasch, on the fiftieth day after that great festival. It was primarily a harvest festival, because the harvest that began at the Pasch was ended at Pentecost. Every man used to bring two loaves, and the head of every family the first fruits of his crops as thank offerings. Later on this festival was observed in thanksgiving for the Law miraculously communicated to Moses on Mount Sinai. Whether we consider it as a harvest festival, a feast of first fruits or a thanksgiving for the old Law, we shall see that it has a prophetic bearing upon the New Dispensation.

The Christian Pentecost is in the spiritual sense also a harvest

festival, and the Holy Ghost is the fruit ripened by the death of Christ, for it was by His death that He bestowed the Holy Ghost upon His Church. Pentecost is a feast of first fruits, for, by the coming of the Holy Ghost, not only was the first assembly of Christians in Jerusalem wholly dedicated to God, but three thousand more were converted by St. Peter's sermon, and these were the first fruits of many thousands brought into the Church by them and by the holy Apostles.

The first Pentecost was also a festival of legislation, inasmuch as the Holy Ghost enlightened our Lord's disciples, so that they then understood fully the doctrines and commandments of Jesus, and the same Spirit gave them courage to proclaim the new law of grace throughout the world.

"This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord: I will give my law in their bowels, and I will write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."—Jer. xxxi, 33.

If you are really to benefit by the feast of Pentecost, you must beg the Holy Ghost to let it be to you a harvest festival, a festival of the Law and a feast of first fruits. May Pentecost be to you a harvest festival in the sense that on this day you renew your good resolution so to live, that in this world you may gather in an abundant harvest of good works, and in the world to come an everlasting reward. Resolve to spare no pains in acquiring all those qualities of mind and heart that are necessary, if your life is to be good and profitable both to yourselves and to others. This will be possible only if Pentecost is to you also a festival of the Law, a festival when you renew your resolution to obey the law of Christ and to turn a deaf ear to the flattering, misleading and deceitful commandments of the world. Let it be to you a day

when, with redoubled fervor, you beg the Holy Ghost to keep you in the way of His commandments in spite of all dangers and temptations. He will not withhold His help if you are determined to observe this day also as a feast of first fruits, when you dedicate to God once and for all the early years of life. If, whilst you are young you learn to cling to God with pure, true, loving hearts, your after life will still be devoted to serving Him faithfully. If in your youth you regard life from a higher point of view than that suggested by love of amusement, vanity or folly, if now you recognize the right though steep path that leads up to heaven, and begin to climb it in a spirit of Christian piety, you will not hereafter desist from the steady, unwearied striving after God, that will finally bring you to your eternal home. If, however, the years of youth are not dedicated as first fruits to God, if they are only first fruits of folly, vanity and love of amusement, or are wasted in unprofitable dreams, it is only too likely that each subsequent year will plunge you more deeply into sin, and will lead you further away from God; whilst the world, that applauded your folly when you were young, will be unable to prevent your falling into everlasting destruction.

Therefore pray to-day and always, with one accord, like the first Christians in Jerusalem, that the Holy Ghost may make you all delight in His law, and give you now true piety and love of God, and throughout life abundant fruits of good works, so that hereafter, by the aid of Him who to-day came down upon the Church, you may be admitted to the glorious presence of God. Amen.

TRINITY SUNDAY

"Teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."—Matt. xxviii, 19.

To-day we think with gratitude of the great benefit conferred upon us by almighty God in instructing us Himself on the subject of His own nature. Our reason tells us that a most wise and powerful Being must exist, for this knowledge is derived from a consideration of the beautiful, orderly arrangement of the world. If we look at anything in nature, whether it be large or small, it teaches us that there must be an all-powerful Being who created it. All created things are intended for our advantage, and we possess not only the necessaries of life, but many other things that add beauty and happiness to our existence; and therefore, with heartfelt gratitude, we see that this all-powerful Being is full of incomprehensible goodness and love towards us.

The orderly arrangement of nature, and still more the wonderful action of Divine Providence in human life, producing effects due to no human wisdom, force us to recognize the infinite wisdom of God. After thus recognizing, by means of our reason, the goodness and wisdom of God, we arrive at a consoling sense of there being a Divine Providence, always watching over us, and guiding us all through life. To question the existence of this Divine Providence is equivalent to denying the evidence of our own reason, which teaches us that we are not masters of our destiny, that things begun badly by men often turn out well, and that things begun with wise prudence, often fail to produce the desired result. There must therefore be a higher Hand guiding the destinies of man, who

otherwise, by his folly and wickedness, would bring nothing but ruin on himself and others.

It is sad that men in their pride doubt the existence of Divine Providence and prefer to believe in blind chance, rather than in a good, wise God, ruling all things with love and power. Such men often fancy that they appear cultured if they express doubts, whereas in reality they are betraying their ignorance, their want of reason, which nothing short of the recognition of God's loving care can satisfy, and their want of heart, for how cold must a heart be that is capable of doubting God's loving Providence, that from their youth onward has protected them from many dangers, assisted them in many difficulties, and never ceases to watch over them! No, a man whose reason has been properly trained knows from nature, history, and his own experience that above us men is an infinitely exalted Being, possessing the fulness of all perfections. Every upright man is impelled to know God as well as he can, for who could have a benefactor and not feel any desire to make his acquaintance? Our sense of gratitude would certainly make us want to give him some proof of our respect, submission and obedience.

How infinitely good it was of God to teach us Himself about His nature and being! What an inexpressible favor He has conferred upon us through our holy religion, which reveals to us the mystery of the most holy Trinity! The mystery is stated plainly in to-day's Gospel. Baptism can be administered only in the name of God, hence when our Lord says: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," He teaches us expressly that the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost are truly God. The Father is truly God, like the Son, and the Son is truly God, like the Holy Ghost; they have *one* Divine essence and nature, so

that there are not three Gods, but one God. The fact that they are distinguished in name shows plainly that they are distinct in Person; there are three Divine Persons, as was revealed clearly at our Lord's baptism in the Jordan, when God the Father allowed His voice to be heard, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," whilst the Holy Ghost, in the form of a dove, hovered above the Head of Jesus.

These considerations throw light upon St. John's statement: "There are three who give testimony in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one" (I. John v, 17). God therefore is revealed to us as the most holy Trinity. It is impossible for us in this life to understand this mystery; many have tried to explain it, but in vain, and any attempt to fathom it leads only to error, unbelief or foolishness. We can easily see why this should be the case. Our reason tells us that God is so great and that we can never hope to understand Him. The infinite God, who created all things in His incomprehensible wisdom, and directs them in His incomprehensible love, can never be laid hold of and understood by the finite, limited and feeble mind of man. If we could understand God, what sort of a God would He be? If we could understand Him, our faith would inevitably waver. If He reveals Himself to us, His nature must be beyond our powers of comprehension. The mystery of the most holy Trinity, far from weakening our faith in God and His holy religion, ought to strengthen it, for that very mystery shows ours to be a heavenly religion, revealed by God Himself. With firm faith, therefore, let us accept the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, and believe it with all our heart, just because God has revealed it to us, and He is the eternal Truth, who can never deceive us.

People who refuse to believe this mystery have to form their

own idea of God, and claim to know Him better than He knows Himself, for it is God who revealed the mystery to us.

This is great folly and presumption, which finally punishes itself by devising most eccentric theories about God, representing Him as a man, weak and prone to error, even as we are. Such people imagine God to be "pure love," one who is always considerate for mankind, but requires neither penance nor amendment. This false idea of God causes them to keep no watch over themselves, to take no pains to avoid evil, to commit every sin to which they have any inclination without ever thinking of penance, and so finally they perish in their sins. A false conception of God, besides keeping men in a state of error, actually conduces to wickedness of life. How much we ought to thank God for having taught us, by holy revelation, to know His real nature, for this stimulates us to lead good lives!

The thought of the Father, to whom, as the source of all being, creation is ascribed, should not only make us thankful, but should force us to acknowledge that we belong altogether to Him, and therefore to dedicate ourselves to Him wholly, body and soul, so that we may serve Him alone.

God created us, and therefore we were created for Him, and all that is not done for Him, all that is done to satisfy our own wishes and inclinations, is a mistake. A true knowledge of God inspires us to follow the right path through life, the path of His commandments, that will ultimately bring us to heaven. We are guided on our way especially by the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity—God the Son in His human nature. Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, redeemed us, and this infinite benefit shows us the awfulness of sin, because none but the Son of God could save us from it. This thought ought to make us be always on our guard, and teach us

to deny ourselves, lest we fall into evil. If ever we are so unhappy as to commit a grievous sin, a glance at the crucifix will prevent our making the mistake of fancying it enough merely to trust in God's infinite love, in order at once to be forgiven. It was only by suffering that the Son could offer satisfaction to His Father's justice, and God's justice would constrain Him to punish us, unless by a worthy reception of the Sacrament of Penance we become entitled to share Christ's merits.

God the Son therefore encourages us to be zealous in doing penance and in seriously striving to amend those faults by which we have offended God.

It is, however, the Holy Ghost who assists us with His grace, so that this amendment may be begun, continued and completed, and result finally in ever-increasing perfection. This thought reminds us of St. Paul's warning: "Receive not the grace of God in vain" (II. Cor. vi, 1). Earnest co-operation with the grace of the Holy Spirit is the fruit of knowledge of the same Spirit, a fruit that makes us abound more and more in good works, and store up merit for eternity.

A knowledge of the incomprehensible mystery of the Blessed Trinity is the foundation of a holy life. Therefore let us to-day thank the Triune God with all our hearts for His goodness in having revealed it to us. Let us accept the dogma of the Blessed Trinity with firm faith; and may this faith lead us to live now so as to honor God in Three Persons, and at last to reach the eternal glory of the Blessed Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"They began all at once to make excuse."—Luke xiv, 18.

Our time is spent in all sorts of different occupations; we think one thing very important and another absolutely necessary, and we are only too apt to devote all our attention to what *appears* indispensable, and to overlook what is really of supreme importance. Our Lord told us what the most important of all things was when He said: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke ii. 49). All that concerns our Father's business and our own eternal salvation ought to take precedence of our worldly interests. Not that we are required to neglect our ordinary occupations, but our care for what is eternal should sanctify all our work, stimulate our energy, and guard us from sin whilst engaged in our ordinary pursuits.

Why are we bound to busy ourselves with what concerns God, rather than with anything else? We belong to Him with all that we are and all that we have. "In Him we live and move and be," as St. Paul said (Acts xvii. 28). Our chief duty therefore is, as our Lord Himself taught us, to render to God the things that are God's. Whatever tends to God's honor must be done first of all. If anyone thinks more of what is temporal than of what is eternal, more of what concerns himself than of what concerns God, he is robbing God and is horribly ungrateful towards Him, and such ingratitude will sooner or later be punished. We enjoy the greatest happiness of which we are capable on earth only if we give ourselves wholly to God. What is earthly and temporal cannot really make us happy, because it can not satisfy the human heart. Some-

times we cherish some earthly desire in our hearts, and imagine that we should be perfectly happy if that wish were gratified, but it is not so, and we are deceiving ourselves. If we obtained what we desired, we should find that the fulfilment of our wish was attended by certain circumstances that we had not taken into consideration, but that greatly diminished, or altogether destroyed, the pleasure which we anticipated. Many a man fancies that he would be happy if only this or that circumstance could be altered; the world may deem him happy, but it knows nothing of his secret troubles. As long as we live in this world there will always be something that we wish to be otherwise; here every day has its end, every blossom withers and dies, and earth with all its joys cannot satisfy us; so that, whoever seeks happiness in earthly pleasures has only himself to blame if he is never quite happy. God alone with His infinite love is able to satisfy the craving of the human heart; and we shall enjoy happiness proportionate to our love of Him The desire for happiness is implanted within us, and ought to urge us on to busy ourselves chiefly with things that concern our Father in heaven.

Such an effort to reach higher things is alone worthy of creatures endowed with reason. If we pursue earthly pleasures and occupy ourselves exclusively with what is temporal, what have we at last? Everything passes away, and what we acquired with so much exertion vanishes, and our labor is wasted. No trace remains even in our memory of many days spent in fruitless toil, and many a man who has worn himself out in the pursuit of earthly riches has to acknowledge, when he comes to die, that all has been in vain; his efforts have been unprofitable, he came into the world poor, and he must leave it poor. He, on the other hand, who has cared most for what concerns his Father in heaven, has been striving

after what is eternal, and not after what is temporal; and he does not leave the results of his labor in this world; they have gone before him into the world to come, and there before the throne of God are all his prayers, all the mourners' tears that he has dried, all the thanks that he has deserved during his life, all the instances of self-denial practiced unknown to men, but known to God—all these are stored up for him in heaven, ready to afford him eternal happiness when he has reached his home above.

O, let us beware of bartering what is eternal for what is temporal! Let us engrave deeply on our hearts the words: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, but to love God and serve Him alone." Let us serve God and busy ourselves chiefly about that concerns Him, and then all that we do, whether great or small, will win us merit for eternity. "To them that love God all things work together unto good" (Rom. viii, 28), and St. Paul is perfectly right in making this assertion, for they are helped in all their undertakings by the Divine grace that Christ obtained for us, and whatever is done with the help of God's grace merits an eternal reward. What does a lover of the world secure by all his work and trouble? If successful, he enjoys a little money and a little honor, and often he gets nothing at all. Which is preferable, the gold of earth or the infinite treasure of God's grace? The esteem of men or the honor of being God's child for ever? Let us therefore do our utmost to busy ourselves chiefly about matters concerning our heavenly Father. Let us do our everyday work, whatever it may be, for love of Him, and then we shall be serving His interests. Even if all our toil and efforts meet with no temporal reward, if they are unappreciated by men and bring us nothing but poverty, contempt, ingratitude and insults, we need not be disturbed, for we know that we shall not have our reward here,

but, when nothing remains to a worldly minded man but the grave, when perhaps his soul is irretrievably lost, we shall be admitted to the Paradise of God's infinite love.

Indeed, even on earth those who busy themselves with the things of God, enjoy great consolation. A worldling may complain of being disappointed, but one who seeks God is sure of his reward. A worldling is despondent in time of tribulation, but one whose conversation is in heaven sees in his trials only a fresh admonition to occupy himself with his heavenly Father's interests, and so to store up merit for himself. He is reminded to be submissive to God's will, to be gentle and patient, and to make progress in the practice of all virtues pleasing to Him. Let us aim first at God and His interests, and then life will become to us a ladder, up which we shall climb higher day by day towards our goal, which can be none other than to become more and more like God, and more and more worthy of His eternal glory.

Let us therefore ask God for grace to occupy ourselves principally with the things of eternity. The more our hearts are filled with this spirit, the more blessed and pleasing to God will our whole lives become, and the greater will be our joy in heaven. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost."—Luke xv, 6.

Nothing tends more to spur us on really to correct our faults than the thought of God's infinite love and mercy. If we look closely at them, we can not resist their influence, for we have a God, a Redeemer, and a Shepherd, who seeks His lost sheep with true, unselfish love. Our being found adds nothing to His majesty and happiness, our being lost does not diminish them, and yet He desires us to attain to salvation and eternal bliss. If we hold aloof from Him, we do so to our own injury. How foolish and ungrateful it is on our part to turn a deaf ear to His voice, when He calls us to amendment of life, for love of Him and for our own welfare! We ought to be more concerned about correcting our faults than about anything else. Let us do our best to have pure hearts to offer to Him. Let us persevere in our endeavor to reach Him and to become more and more perfect. Jesus sought us and found us; by means of baptism He admitted us to His Church, and whenever we have sinned He has sought and found us again in the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. Let us hold fast to Him! A noble example of adherence to Christ is set us by the first community of Christians, who gathered round the Apostles as soon as the Holy Ghost had come down upon them. The thrilling words of St. Peter's first sermon had moved all hearts, and when they had been purified in the water of baptism, and had received the grace of God, they formed a community destined to be a model for Christians of every age. Those early Christians had recourse to

the right means of preserving and increasing the grace bestowed upon them. They persevered in the outward worship of God with zealous devotion, and we read in the Acts of the Apostles the following short but striking account of them: "They were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts ii, 42).

These words show us that Christians have always regarded the outward worship of God as a sacred duty, and as the best means of attaining salvation. It is a disastrous mistake to suppose that it is enough to worship God in one's heart, and that it is unnecessary to take part in any public worship. Such a mistake can be made only by the lukewarm, who care nothing for the things of God, or by those who fancy themselves cultured and think that they display their superiority by refusing to join others in prayer, or by eccentric dreamers, who prefer what is imaginary to what is solid and true. It is a duty, binding upon every Christian, to take part in the public worship of God, and this duty is a great joy and privilege, for to join with others in asking favors of God and to share with others the grace that He bestows, is indeed a happiness, and at the same time each one is helped and strengthened by his neighbor's example. By God's grace and the force of mutual example, public worship becomes a source of blessing and encouragement. Hence you should at all times take pleasure in devoutly assisting at it; may it conduce to your spiritual progress, strength and perfection, and may you be at the same time a means of edifying and encouraging your fellow worshippers. Many Christians in this world complain that their sphere of action is very limited and they cannot be of use to many people, but what a wide field of activity lies open to each of us at public worship! There it is possible for the simplest and humblest to do more for the edi-

fication and encouragement of others, by unaffected piety, genuine devotion and quiet fervour, than can be effected by the most eloquent sermons. Attendance at public worship is a duty for the strong, as well as for the weak. How strong were those first Christians, the original three thousand and the others who joined them in accepting our Lord's doctrines! Yet it is of them that St. Luke says: "They were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts ii, 42). We have here in the history of the early Church all the essentials of public worship in the Catholic Church to this day, viz., instruction, the sacrifice of Holy Mass as Communion, and prayer. In the Acts, the most holy Sacrament of the Altar is mentioned between the instruction and prayer, for it is from Holy Mass, the sacrifice of the Altar, that both instruction and prayer derive their efficacy. Without it instruction would be given to no purpose, and our prayers would not penetrate to the height of heaven. "They were persevering . . . in the communication of the breaking of bread," i. e., they broke bread in common. Even non-Catholic commentators do not deny that this refers to the most holy Sacrament of the Altar. It was so called because, at its institution our Lord Himself broke the bread that He changed into His own Body. St. Paul, too, writes: "The bread, which we break, is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord?" (I. Cor. x, 16).

Like the first Christians, the Catholic Church still regards the holy Sacrifice of the Mass as the chief part of our worship of God, for there is no real worship without sacrifice. It betrays complete ignorance of the essence of religion to suppose that we could dispense with the Sacrifice of the Mass, and that it would be enough to recite some beautiful prayers either in the privacy of one's own room, or out in the open country. When we say prayers, we make

use of our own feeble expressions, but at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass Jesus presents our prayers to His heavenly Father, praying for us and acting as our mediator, so that through Him our prayers, offered to the Father in and with Him, acquire infinite power of impetration. Nor can holy Mass be replaced by a sermon or by pious reading, for in both sermons and reading God speaks to us, but in holy Mass He pours out upon us His living grace.

Never in all your life let yourselves be hindered from assisting at the holy Sacrifice with true, heartfelt devotion. In every other part of our worship we *seek* God, but at Mass we *find* Him. If you know how to hear Mass as the Catholic Church would have you do, you will certainly not be lost. If you ever begin to waver you will derive fresh strength from the Mass. At the same time you should not neglect hearing instructions. The first Christians were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles; that is to say, they came eagerly to be instructed by the Apostles, and were never tired of hearing them. The zeal of a Christian should be intelligent, for if it is unenlightened it often is an obstacle to his own salvation as well as to that of others, or, at least, it prevents him from doing as much good as he would be able to effect, were he better instructed in the doctrines of faith. Hence it is of the utmost importance to every Christian to hear God's word devoutly, to impress upon his mind the teaching of the Church, and frequently to meditate upon the truths of our holy faith. The more often and the more attentively we listen to the word of God, the better shall we realize the beauty of our Lord's teaching, and the fact that beneath the mist enveloping the learning of this world there is no solid truth. We shall moreover gain power to resist the temptations by means of which the world strives to rob us of our faith, and with it of our peace of mind and everlasting salvation.

The first Christians were persevering in prayer; nothing checked their faithful practice of it, not the coldness and indifference of the world, and not their own dryness or disinclination. What blessings were won by this persevering prayer! This thought should encourage you to join together in prayer with real devotion, remembering our Lord's promise: "Where there are two or three gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matth. xviii, 20). When you pray together, think of Jesus as being in your midst, for He really is with you. He will hear your united prayer and give you His blessing, so that you may ever grow in virtue, and sin may be driven out. He will cause you to be filled with a spirit of zeal, humility and obedience; He will help you to live at peace with one another and to be united in true charity towards God and man, and then you will become like that first Christian community, which heard the good Shepherd's voice and was faithful to Him, and so could never be separated from Him. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."—Luke v, 8.

The miraculous draught of fishes, of which St. Luke gives us an account in to-day's Gospel, made St. Peter believe so thoroughly in our Lord's divinity that he sank on his knees in adoration, crying: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." These words are expressive of profound humility. St. Peter himself unworthy even to look at One whom this miracle revealed as the Son of God; he was not worthy to be so close to God, but the reverence with which he uttered these humble words shows that his most earnest desire was for Jesus to remain with him. St. Peter's example teaches us how sincerely we ought to acknowledge our misery before God and how humbly we ought to confess that we are unworthy of His help, but at the same time we should implore Him not to look at our unworthiness, and in His infinite goodness and mercy to abide with us always.

"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." This is the chief trouble of human life, that we can never be as good as we should be. We keep our good resolutions only partially; in fact if we were faithfully to keep even some of them, we should have made far more progress in virtue than is really the case. As it is, we make resolutions to-day, and forget them to-morrow; we are uncertain whether to keep or abandon them, and this constant wavering between two opinions robs us of inward peace and prevents our attaining to solid virtue. What we have many reasons for considering good to day will to-morrow seem doubtful, and we

shall discover just as many arguments against it as we now have for it, and so we waste precious time in a state of doubt, indecision and hesitation, and instead of becoming more like God, we grow more unlike Him. What wretched creatures we are in His sight! He never changes and we are always wavering between good and evil; He is always the same towards us, and we are so fickle in our love of Him! We ought to pray with deep humility for strength and determination to do right. Yet it is not merely our want of resolution that hinders our spiritual progress, but our faults and sins reveal to us our misery, since we have repeatedly offended God by them.

How mean and unworthy we are in the sight of God, who is all-holy! In his humility St. Augustine exclaims: "Thou art good, and I am evil; Thou art justice, and I am unjust; Thou art light, and I am blind; Though art the remedy for disease, and I am sick; Thou art supreme Truth, whilst in me is nothing but vanity." Sin is the chief misery of human life, for it separates us from God, hinders us from fulfilling our true destiny and brings discord into our soul. It plunges us into the things of this world, leads us astray, and makes us pursue vain shadows that finally always deceive us. It entangles us in what is earthly, and so we forget what is eternal.

No one but God can deliver us from this state of spiritual misery. From Him alone comes pardon; He alone can make us His children again. He alone can give us strength to amend our ways and to overcome temptation. Our sins may render us unworthy to speak to the Lord, yet at the same time they compel us to call upon Him. St. Augustine exclaimed: "My contrition constrains me, my misery forces me to call upon Thee. I am sick, therefore I have recourse to the Physician; I am blind, therefore I appeal to

the eternal Light, I am dead, therefore I long for life. Thou art my Physician, my Light and my Life; Jesus of Nazareth, have mercy upon me; Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!"

Jesus will hear us if we earnestly cry to Him, for however blind and wretched we may be in His sight owing to our sins, His mercy is infinite. He will help us to conquer all our sins, even those into which we are most liable to fall; and He will enable us to avoid them in future, no matter what temptations the fortunes of life may bring with them.

The misery of human life is seen in the fact that everything is so subject to change. We make all sorts of plans and prepare for this or that state of affairs, and often all turns out differently, in a way quite contrary to our expectations. God controls our destiny; we cannot do so. How insignificant we are in comparison with God! We cannot say with certainty regarding the smallest event that it will occur in some particular way. God directs even the most trifling things so that they carry out His will, and we are not only unable to foresee His decrees, but we cannot understand in many cases how they can be beneficial, nor how our very hindrances can eventually lead us up to the light. Our inability to comprehend God's designs makes us realize our own nothingness, and ought at the same time to fill us with boundless confidence in Him.

What our intellect fails to fathom, lies open before His all-seeing eye as conducive to our salvation; what causes us joy is really often a punishment, whilst what seems disastrous may be, in His Hand, the seed of our truest happiness. Therefore we must leave things to Him, troubling about nothing save at every moment to do His Will, and thus the miseries of life will be transformed into joy and gladness in eternity.

Our present life is subject to many accidents and of short dura-

tion. The longer we live, the more does our vigor diminish; the further it seems to advance, the weaker it grows. Nothing is permanent, all is liable to change. Joy alternates with sorrow, happiness with grief, laughter with tears; sickness follows health, and death life. We have nothing lasting, and in this fact again we recognize our misery; One alone is unchangeable, the infinite, eternal God. Our life is great and worthy only if we cling to Him, love Him and remain in union with Him. Without Him we are poor, weak and wretched; with Him we are rich, strong and happy; without Him there is no progress in good, no forgiveness and correction of sins, no confidence amidst the fluctuating fortunes of life, and no refuge in death; with Him we can overcome sin and grow rich in virtue, whilst we trust all that concerns us to His care. Therefore let us love Him with all our hearts, never wavering; let us not be captivated by sin, not confused if we fail to comprehend God's designs; let us willingly endure the changing circumstances of life, for in this way only shall we rise above its miseries and live worthily; in this way only shall we, weak mortals as we are, deserve some day to have God Himself as our exceeding great reward. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"Unless your justice abound more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."—Matth. v, 20.

The justice and piety of the scribes and Pharisees was false, because it sprang from a wrong motive. It was self-love, rather than a love of God, that made them practice virtue; for they hoped to win glory for themselves, and not for Him, by their goodness. True piety proceeds from a firm conviction that we are nothing in ourselves, but owe everything to God, and this knowledge leads us to sacrifice everything to Him, and do everything for love of Him.

Frequent consideration of His innumerable and generous benefits tends greatly to make us try to do right and lead a good life.

St. Augustine in his intense love of God exclaims with rapture: "I will praise Thee for having created me, when I was nothing; for having enlightened me, when I was in darkness; for having raised me to life, when I was dead, and for having nourished me from my childhood with Thy good gifts."

"I will praise Thee for having created me, when I was nothing." God created us in His goodness and love; our creation added nothing to His glory and happiness, but He called us into being that we might share His glory and happiness, and might rejoice with Him for ever. This is why He bestowed upon man so many excellent faculties and tendencies, and, what is of infinitely more importance, this is why He elevated man to a state of sanctifying grace. "Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor," as the Psalmist exclaimed, overpowered by a sense of gratitude. By the redemption man recovered the grace lost in consequence of original

sin, and this grace is given to each of us at baptism. God's grace is the crown that He gives us in this life, and we must control ourselves in order to preserve it; by self-control we show our gratitude for our creation and sanctification. If a Christian ceases to exercise self-control and becomes a slave to his passions and desires, he has thrown away the crown that God gave him, and shown himself most ungrateful.

Whenever we think of the benefits conferred upon us in our creation, redemption and sanctification, we should renew our resolution to aim at self-control, without which true virtue and justice are impossible.

"I will praise Thee for having enlightened me, when I was in darkness." It is useless to possess the gift of reason unless we use it to recognize truth. Truth is our highest good, for it alone throws light upon the road that leads through this transitory existence into the life where nothing passes away. If God had left our reason unaided, we should never have discovered this road; but He has enlightened us by means of the Light that He sent into the world. We owe Him most heartfelt thanks for the light of faith. True justice cannot exist without this light, and so it is a sacred duty to display our gratitude towards God by doing our best to preserve and increase our faith. To be indifferent in matters of faith is tantamount to being indifferent to virtue and justice.

"I will praise Thee for having raised me to life, when I was dead." St. Augustine was speaking of the death of sin. If we had remained thus dead, all the riches and glory of the world could have availed us nothing; and when God has raised anyone to life from the spiritual life of sin, it behooves him most carefully to avoid and shun all that leads to death. To act otherwise would be base ingratitude.

The justice of the scribes and Pharisees was false because it was only in appearance that they avoided sin; they aimed at concealing their real wickedness from the eyes of men, but cared very little whether their hearts were spiritually dead in God's sight.

Let us strive to avoid sin, not only for the sake of men, but before God. We shall never discharge our duty of gratitude towards Him as long as we are more anxious that men should not know our faults, than that God should not look down upon us with displeasure.

"I will praise Thee for having nourished me from my childhood with Thy good gifts." St. Augustine's words ought to fill us with shame for our habit of forgetting all the good things that God has lavished upon us from our birth onwards, and of grumbling at the troubles that He has sent us. If we were true Christians we should recognize the loving Hand of God even in our troubles. Complaints and discontent are evidence of great ingratitude towards Him.

There can be no real justice and piety where there is impatience, discontent and complaining at what God does. If we want to find out whether we serve Him in the right way, we need only ask ourselves whether we accept whatever He sends us with submissive and contented hearts. As long as we make no progress in acquiring a submissive and contented spirit, our justice is, to say the least, very doubtful.

God who created, redeemed, sanctified and enlightened us, and who raised us from the death of sin, must certainly always desire what is for our good. Therefore let us say with St. Augustine: "I will praise Thee for having nourished me from my childhood with Thy good gifts."

It is easy enough to say these words, but we need God's grace

if we are to utter them from the depths of our hearts, being determined that our feeling of gratitude shall manifest itself in a life of gratitude, a life characterized by self-control, faith, loving activity, submission and contentment. Let us implore almighty God to make us thoroughly perceive the infinite magnitude of His benefits, and also to make us really grateful, so that our hearts may be completely dedicated to Him in our gratitude. With fervent adoration let us pray with St. Augustine: "O my God, reveal to me, wretched creature that I am, how much I ought to love Thee; speak, O Lord, loudly within my heart, and save me."

Open my eyes to Thy light, that I may see and know Thee, and confess Thee with my whole heart. O God, Thou art the life of my soul; through Thee I live, and without Thee I die; Thou art the light of my eyes; through Thee I see, and without Thee I am blind; Thou art the joy of my heart and the gladness of my spirit; make me love Thee with all my heart and all my soul, because Thou hast first loved me. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"They did eat and were filled, and they took up that which was left of the fragments, seven baskets."—Mark viii, 8.

The miraculous feeding of the multitude, of which to-day's Gospel gives us an account, reminds us that Jesus, the true Bread of heaven, came down to earth to be the food of our souls and bring them to life everlasting. Mankind, hungering and thirsting after true justice, looks up to Him, and He satisfies all with His grace. We, too, are hungry and thirsty, looking up with earnest desire of heaven, and He will bring us thither, if we follow Him. He is no less merciful now than when He said: "I have compassion on the multitude," and by His help we shall one day reach the abode of everlasting peace, where we shall drink of the fulness of His grace and joy, that fulness which contains unspeakable happiness for all eternity. We are destined for undying glory and bliss; in this fact is the dignity of man most beautifully revealed; and we perceive our destiny if we consider the dignity conferred by God upon man even now in this world.

In the world to come, the good will enjoy great honor and glory, for they will be not angels, but like to and equal to the angels, being children of God, because the Son of God became Man. Therefore every Christian possesses great dignity even on earth, and this is the fact of which we can really be glad and proud. At the Ascension our Lord in His human nature went up to heaven in order that all who through Him have become children of God may also go whither the Son of God has gone. In heaven He is highly exalted in His human nature, in order that all who follow

Him here may be assured of sharing His indescribable glory in heaven. Indescribable, indeed, is the glory reserved for the children of God, far beyond all that our imagination can picture or our hearts desire.

Therefore, whilst we are in this world, let us walk with Christ, through whom alone we can attain to that true glory. To walk with Christ is the same thing as to live like a child of God; and he only walks with Christ who seeks happiness nowhere save in God, and, like Christ, desires not his own glory, but that of his heavenly Father. One who walks with Christ looks constantly at Him, remembering that even the Son of Man had to enter into His glory through self-denial, suffering and sacrifice. One who walks with Christ aims not at the things of earth, but at those of heaven, striving ever to become more like his Divine Master. Let us often think of the glory of heaven, secured for us by our God, Brother and Saviour, for this thought will help us really to walk in the way of holiness with Him. The glory and joy of heaven consists primarily in the contemplation and possession of God. This contemplation of God includes a delight in and knowledge of His works, not merely of the things that He created, but also of His government of the universe. All that has been obscure to us here on earth will be cleared and intelligible to us there. Now we know God reflected, as it were, in the mirror of His creation, and even in this partial knowledge we find great satisfaction and joy. Far more perfect, however, is the knowledge that we derive from revelation, and especially from Christ's teaching. Whence did we receive the grace of knowing God and His revelations? It came to us by no merit of our own, and so we are bound all the more to be thankful for it. It is only by true thankfulness, manifesting itself in a right use of His benefits, that we can become worthy

of the reward promised us by God. We make a right use of the revelation that we have received through Christ, when we accept it with firm faith, letting it have a practical influence upon our actions, and when we accept with humility all those truths which, far from contradicting the reason of man, lie above it, and are inexplicable by means of it alone.

Let us firmly resolve that throughout life we will accept these truths; they will be our light on the way that we must follow in order to attain to the contemplation of God.

Inseparably connected with this contemplation will be the love of God in heaven, which corresponds with the possession of what is infinitely good. It is only by loving God here that we shall gain that entrancing love of Him in heaven. If we are too weak to love Him fervently now, Jesus will help us, so let us pray earnestly for this love on earth, for in heaven it will be transformed into the delight of possessing Him. He has given us, in His infinite love, all the means that we require to enable us to reach the joy and glory of heaven. It depends upon ourselves alone whether we obtain what He desires to give us, provided we make a good use of the means at our disposal. We resolve to use them rightly, but the world does its best to prevent us from keeping this resolution. Therefore it behooves us often to meditate quietly upon the eternal reward awaiting us. May the remembrance of it strengthen us in our endeavor to walk with Christ, and not only to be true to our holy faith, but to unite with it a really heartfelt love of God, in order that our craving after God, innate in every heart unspoiled by the world, our hunger and thirst after justice, may one day be really satisfied in heaven, where all joy and glory are made perfect. **Amen.**

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"Not every one that saith to Me: 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."—Matth. vii, 21.

Piety that consists only in saying prayers is not worthy of the name; it confuses the end with the means, and is apt to degenerate into absolute evil when anyone fancies that by prayer and pious practices he can make reparation for his sins, and need not trouble about amendment of life. To call God "Lord" in prayer, but in life to desire to be one's own lord, is a contradiction that leads to destruction. Yet, on the other hand, it is impossible without prayer to live a life of piety and perfectly to comply with God's will.

We ought to *resolve* to lead a good life, but we must hope for grace from above to enable us to do so. As St. Augustine says: "Who can enter into the glory of the Lord and contemplate His power, unless He opens the door? And who can open the door, if He has shut it? The sanctuary that it behooves us to enter here on earth, is the sanctuary of virtue based on faith. The way to it is full of difficulties; in fact, without God it is hard to find the right road, for there are so many others resembling it, but leading eventually to evil and not to good. The world often calls a way the path of virtue, whereas it is nothing but vanity, ambition and wickedness. Even if we start along the right road, we are very apt to stray from it, and it does not follow, because we lead respectable lives, that we have reached the sanctuary of virtue, for this consists in loving God, and none but God Himself can open to us true love of Him. Therefore fear often takes possession of us when we are really trying to reach the sanctuary of virtue, and we ask ourselves in

alarm: "Will not my weakness make me fall on the way? The eyes of my mind are darkened, shall I not mistake a wrong road for the right one? Nothing but love of God can open to us the sanctuary of true virtue; shall I always really love Him? Will not my self-love often triumph over my love of God? The heart of man is fickle; although to-day I desire to do right, shall I always desire it? May not bad companions and bad examples cause me to waver in my good resolutions as life goes on? Must I not fear my own liability to change, so that what now appears to me sacred may become a matter of indifference, and what now seems the highest wisdom may hereafter seem folly?"

One thing alone can overcome this fear, this inability to trust ourselves; one thing alone can encourage us, when we remember our own weakness, and that is hope, true confidence in God. It is right for us to have this hope and confidence; we may hope that God will guide and govern us for our good, because He created us. St. Augustine expresses in the following beautiful words this reason for our reliance upon God's natural assistance. "Help me, O God, my Life, that I may not perish in my iniquity. If Thou, O God, hadst not created me, I should not have existed; because Thou hast created me, I exist. My merits did not constrain Thee to create me, but Thy merciful goodness and love. May that love that forced Thee, O my God, to create me, force Thee also, I implore Thee, to guide me. For what would it profit me that in Thy love Thou hadst created me, if I perished in my misery, and if Thy right hand guided me not? May Thy love constrain Thee to save him whom Thou hast created, for Thy Hand is still powerful, as Thou didst prove by my creation."

May our good God, who created us to be happy with Him in heaven, assist us with His power, so that we may follow the right

path, which we can find only in the sanctuary of Divine love. God is the object of our hope and trust; may He help us, His creatures, so that we may become and remain His loving and obedient children; this is our sweetest hope and in it we place all our confidence.

If ever doubt and fear assail us, and our hearts lose courage, if we look into the future, afraid lest we should be led astray, so as to mistake the way of sin for that of virtue, and the path of unbelief for that of faith, then let us at once renew our hope and confidence in God's goodness.

By hope we cling lovingly to Him, begging Him always to remain with us. Hope encourages us to look to Him with childlike confidence for protection in danger and for help in difficulties. Confidence is a vigorous hope, and both gain additional strength if we are zealous in considering the truths of our holy religion. The more plainly we see that God is all power, all knowledge, goodness, mercy, truth and everlasting love, the firmer will be our trust in Him. Our confidence will be strengthened by an intelligent survey of history, especially of sacred history, which will show us how mercifully and wisely God directs the destiny of whole nations. It is easy for Him to frustrate the wicked intentions of the mighty, and to bring to a successful issue the efforts of the righteous; He can save, even when the peril seems unavoidable. Although He has created all men with free will, they must eventually contribute to the carrying out of His designs. The history of nations and of the great men of the world teaches us that God governs all things wisely for the good of His own children, and this knowledge should be to us a firm foundation for our confidence that He will direct and govern everything for our good also.

Our confidence will be strengthened moreover by a survey of

our own lives, and by a grateful remembrance of the guidance that has made itself felt at many critical moments. The more we accustom ourselves to follow His guidance by submitting to His will, the greater will be our trust in Him. Hope and trust in God lead us to do His will. Hope united with love becomes an earnest longing for God. A consideration of His perfections also adds strength to our confidence, for it convinces our reason, more and more completely, that eternal happiness can be the lot of those only who do His will under His guidance.

If, however, hope remains without works, our confidence is unfounded, and the sanctuary of virtue and the gate of eternal happiness will never open to admit us. This is the truth that our Lord stated in words apparently severe, but really full of kindness, when He said: "Not every one that saith to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." The statement is severe only for those who refuse to serve God; the conclusion of it applies to the good: "He that doth the will of My Father, who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matth. vii, 21). Amen.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

"The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."—Luke xvi, 8.

However great the wisdom of this world may be, it proves eventually to be mere foolishness. It is seen to be folly when the worldly-wise man comes to die, and all the possessions that he has accumulated avail him nothing, and when he looks in vain for friends to secure him admission to heaven. The worldly-wise man employs all possible means, even such as are sinful, to acquire earthly wealth, and his folly is manifest, for he barters the grace of God, his greatest treasure, for what is trivial; he gives up what is eternal to gain what is temporal, and sacrifices eternity for a moment of time, so great is his folly. It is folly to have recourse to clever devices to deceive mankind, since God, on whose judgment everything depends, can never be deceived. He alone is truly wise who never forgets that God sees all our actions and knows our secret intentions, and who lives in conformity with this knowledge.

God's eye is more searching than the light of the sun; it sees all the ways of men, penetrates to the depth of their hearts, and beholds all, good and bad, wherever they may be. God is present everywhere, providing for all His creatures; He observes all our steps, watches over us day and night, and witnesses all our actions, as if, forgetting heaven and earth, He were caring only for each individual amongst us. He regards each individual as if he alone existed; He sees all collectively as if they were but one. He is with us wherever we go, so that He is always the source of our life, and for this reason, because He is constantly mindful of us, we ought likewise to be mindful of Him. Gratitude requires this

of us; if the infinitely great God cares for us continually, ought we not to think of Him? He is always looking at us, and we surely ought not to forget Him. It is therefore an excellent thing to accustom ourselves frequently during the day to turn our thoughts to God, and to remember His presence. There is no better way of advancing in virtue. Our good resolutions, made when we pray, avail nothing, if, having finished our prayer, we at once lose sight of God and of the resolutions just formed. We are easily carried away by our passions, unless we are restrained by the thought of God's presence.

His benefits that we enjoy day after day leave us cold and indifferent, and instead of lifting us up, plunge us deeper in the mire of sensuality, unless we think of the Giver. The obstacles in our way, when we try to do right, seem insurmountable, unless we remember Him, by whose aid even what is hardest becomes possible.

God's eye is ever upon us, and the eyes of our mind ought always to be turned towards Him, for then only shall we rightly perceive what we ought to do, and how we ought to do it. We require to know how to act at every moment of our existence. Many have a general idea of what God's will is, but they often fail to notice an opportunity for performing some good action. For instance, they overlook the moment for practicing humility, self-denial or obedience, in spite of having resolved to practice these virtues. Thus they waste opportunities through not recognizing them as such, and are quite self-satisfied, although they ought rather to be dissatisfied with themselves for not having benefited by their opportunity of doing right.

If we look up often to God, our souls will be strengthened and enabled to see these opportunities when they occur. God is ever present with us, and willing to bestow them, if only we are ready to

make use of them. Therefore during the course of each day let us often lift up our hearts to Him with a fervent prayer for light to see when we have it in our power to do a good action; let us ask Him to help us not to make the mistake of supposing that good is accomplished only by extraordinary works, but to recognize the truth that the smallest incidents in life supply us with opportunities of showing our love of God.

The thought of God's presence encourages us not only to recognize and use our opportunities of doing good, but also to have the right intention of pleasing God in all that we do, for this is more important than the work itself. Works done without this good intention are like dead seeds that can never produce blossoms and fruit for eternity. Let us always strive to have this intention, because this is what God looks at most.

St. Augustine composed the following beautiful prayer: "Thou seest, O Lord, whence proceeds the spirit that prompts my actions, for Thou weighest the spirits, and Thou, the true Judge, who surveyest my inward thoughts, knowest whether the root of my actions, from which fair leaves appear to grow, be really sweet or bitter; Thou canst penetrate to the very sap of this root; Thou perceivest, in the bright light of truth, not only our intentions, but the most secret depth underlying them, so that Thou art able to requite to each, not merely according to his actions, but also according to his intentions; not only according to his intentions, but also according to the secret depths underlying his disposition. Thou seest what is the real aim of my efforts when I do any work; Thou knowest what hidden thoughts are in my mind and in what I take delight; Thine ear heareth all things, and Thou listenest, recording them, both good and bad, in Thy book, in order that Thou mayest assign rewards to what is good, and punishment to what is evil,

when at the last day Thou openest Thy book, and men are judged according to what is written in that record of omniscience and justice."

If we consider these words of the great Doctor of the Church, we must inevitably feel overwhelmed with shame, for we must acknowledge that our actions may often have appeared as fair leaves, but their root has been bitter, for our intention was not pleasing to God or praiseworthy.

At the same time we ought to fear that perhaps in many cases when we believe ourselves to be acting in conformity with the will of God, our actions may not have been pleasing to Him, because we had not the right intention. This fear ought to make us careful about our intentions, but it should not degenerate into scrupulosity, for this would in its turn be a source of many temptations and sins.

Let us examine ourselves to see whether our intentions are good, and if we find them to be more or less faulty, let us try to abandon them at once, doing our best in this respect, but not desponding, if from time to time, owing to our natural weakness, our intentions are not so pure as they should be. The God of all-seeing justice, who always and everywhere surveys our inmost thoughts, is also the God of infinite love, knowing our frailty, and ready, in His infinite mercy, to make good our failures, if only we, poor weak mortals that we are, do our best faithfully and honestly to strive after what is right. Our fear of God should therefore give place to a childlike, trusting love, and we may look up to Him as His loving children, whilst He looks down on us with a father's tenderness. Our weakness may make us stumble, but love lifts us up again after each fall; weakness may lag behind, but love presses forward. May our love of God help us to acquire ever greater perfection in His holy sight. Amen.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"If thou hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace!"—Luke xix, 42.

Jesus wept over the blindness of the people of Jerusalem, knowing that for most of them He had come in vain to this world. He had preached in vain in their midst, and He was about to die for them in vain. He wept over the city because it did not know the things that were to its peace. It would have been to its peace to accept not only His teaching, but also the grace to be acquired by means of His redemption. His grace, that He offered with such infinite love, and the refusal of which forced tears of sorrow to flow from His sacred eyes, was ignored, not used, and even rejected with scorn and ingratitude by the Jews.

By shedding these tears our Lord showed Himself to be indeed our Redeemer. Just as on this occasion in His grief He sought to bring the Jews to a knowledge of their sinfulness, and to induce them to accept the grace offered them; so, later on, in the agony of His mind and body, He really won this grace for men.

By shedding these tears our Lord taught us that redemption did not mean merely teaching certain doctrines, but obtaining the grace that we need; for He would never have wept over Jerusalem for a matter of doctrine. At the present day people are fond of telling us that Jesus was nothing more than a teacher, who taught us to walk in charity; and they regard this charity as the motive of His actions and teaching in such a way as to represent every offense as a trifle, easily overlooked by God, forgetting that Jesus told the young man to keep the Commandments.

Jesus wept, because the Jews rejected the grace that He offered

them that they might be truly converted, and released from their sins, and be able in future to endure the conflict with temptation; He wept, because they did not know the things that were to their peace. Mere instruction and a knowledge of the truth can not bring peace. Sin has planted discord in our hearts, and peace will reign in them only when atonement has been made for it. Man is not at peace when he has to struggle against obstacles that he can not overcome. When the task set us is beyond our strength, when we are striving to accomplish what is impossible, we are out of harmony with ourselves and a prey to bitter discontent. Peace can not prevail unless we not only know what we ought to do, but feel within us the power to carry it out. History teach us that, with regard to what is right, we do not possess this power so completely as to be independent of God.

Jesus wept, both because the Jews refused to hear His teaching, and because they rejected His warnings and graces: "If thou hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace!" What a reproach, what pain at their failure to recognize their Redeemer, the Bringer of Peace, do these words express! We can do nothing without God's grace, which Jesus, our Redeemer, won for us by His death on the Cross.

What is the use of all our knowledge if we are not cleansed from the sins into which we have fallen? And how can we be cleansed from them without Christ? We ought never to despair if we fall into sin; we have only to grasp His hand and rise again, so as to begin a fresh life with Him.

It would not, of course, benefit us much to rise again if we immediately fell back into the same sin, but even in this respect we acknowledge Jesus and the grace that He supplies as our sole support, and this encourages us when we realize our weakness and

poverty. If we are poor in power, Jesus is rich in strength, and what would be impossible to us of ourselves, we can accomplish by His aid. However hard it may seem to us to cure our faults, we shall succeed through Him; for we are not fighting alone, but He is on our side. We can perform any good work, however difficult, yet not we, but Christ in us. He confirms our feeble strength, so that we can do whatever He requires of us for our good.

It is therefore His grace that works in us, and this thought ought to give us the humility that we need so much. All the good that we possess is due to God's grace, and so we can never boast of it, for it is God's, and not our own. As St. Augustine says: "Whoever seeks his own glory on account of the good that belongs to God, is a thief and a robber. If any one, relying on the good qualities that he possesses, seeks his own glory rather than God's, he may be praised by men, but by Thee, O God, will he be blamed, because he uses Thy gift for his own and not Thy honor. If Thou blamest one who is praised by men, he can not be defended by them; if Thou judgest him, he can not be delivered by men after Thou hast condemned him."

Let us, thereore, humbly acknowledge that all good things come to us from God, and confess that we owe deliverance from sin and protection against evil to His grace alone. By humility and confidence we render ourselves worthy to receive the grace that will lead us to true peace. Jesus shed His Blood to purchase for us this Divine grace; may He never weep over us because we have rejected this grace, and not accepted Him as our Redeemer.

With heartfelt gratitude for His grace, let us often look up to God, striving better to appreciate the infinite benefit that He bestows upon us, and let us exclaim with St. Augustine: "O Lord, Thy grace ever encompasseth me, delivering me from all evil, for

it saveth me from what is past, warneth me against present dangers and protecteth me against such as threaten me in the future." May it save, warn and protect us always, until, saved by Thy mercy, O Lord, we appear in Thy holy presence. Amen.

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"The Pharisee standing prayed thus with himself: 'O God, I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men.'"—Luke xviii, 11.

Although, according to his own testimony, the Pharisee practised various kinds of mortification, he did not go back to his house justified; and his prayer shows us why this was the case, for it proceeded from a proud undisciplined heart. All his works of mortification were exterior, and, true interior mortification being absent, they were worthless in God's sight. In this parable Jesus teaches us how indispensable it is to practise inward mortification, without which outward works are of no value.

Inward mortification aims at subduing all undisciplined thoughts, wishes, tendencies and desires, and at stifling sin at the outset. Its task is to correct and bring into conformity with the will of God whatever in our souls is not yet wholly in accordance with it, whatever is wavering and prone to evil, or actually corrupt. This definition shows us at once how necessary it is to practise inward mortification. Nothing but interior strength enables us to triumph in every struggle and in all circumstances of life, and this strength depends not upon robust physical health, but upon the vigor of the soul. Our future for all eternity is decided not by appearances but by reality, and he alone who is master over his soul, and not only over his outward actions, can find favor with God. There is no sin into which a man may not fall in spite of much outward mortification, and also there is no virtue which inward mortification will not enable him to practise. Thomas à Kempis makes a very true and beautiful remark on this subject: "If we were perfectly dead to ourselves, and no ways entangled in earthly pursuits, then might

we taste the savor of divine things, and experience something of heavenly contemplation. The whole hindrance, and a very great one, is that we are not free from passions and lusts, and strive not to walk in the perfect way of the saints. When we are met by even a little adversity we are too soon cast down, and seek after human consolation" (*Following of Christ,* I, c. xi, n. 3). Yes, if we were more inwardly mortified, our faith would be stronger, our confidence more firm, our love of God more full of joyful submission, and our whole life would then be an unbroken series of actions pleasing to Him. Hence Holy Scripture insists upon the need of inward mortification, as we read in the book of Joel: "Rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God" (ii, 13). The prophet is urging the Jews to do penance, and referring to their practise of tearing the outer garments as a sign of inward sorrow. He declares that this outward demonstration of repentance is worthless before God, unless their hearts are filled with true contrition for sin. Just as a golden goblet studded with precious stones can, if empty, afford no refreshment to a thirsty man, so are external actions of no value for the soul, if unaccompanied by the right inward dispositions. What is the use of prayer without devotion, of good deeds performed without charity, or of tears without true repentance and firm purpose of amendment?

We see here one great reason why many people make no spiritual progress, in spite of outwardly practising their religion. In their case everything is on the outside, and nothing inside. A dead tree, hollow and lifeless, may be decked with fresh leaves and fragrant blossoms, but it will never bear any fruit; on the contrary, it will be thrown to the ground by a violent gust of wind. You should strive, by the aid of God's grace, to discipline your hearts, to ac-

quire self-control and to mortify whatever in the depths of your nature could injure your soul, and then your piety will be genuine. In your examination of conscience, before asking yourselves what you have done, look at your motives, but do so honestly, as in God's sight, for we are apt to deceive ourselves, and when we profess to examine our hearts we prefer to glance only at what is superficial, so that, if I may use such an expression, we generally see only the surface of our own hearts. We may recognize our faults and purpose amendment, but we often imagine that amendment consists in a few good resolutions and phrases that we adopt. Superficially, therefore, our hearts may be free from faults, that live in full vigor within their depths. Because perhaps we no longer allow these defects to show themselves very decidedly, we assume that we have overcome them, and do not notice that secretly and without acknowledging it, we are still influenced in our actions by the same old faults.

If, for instance, a Christian should resist a temptation to vainglory only when it was manifest to all men, he is still acting under the influence of his tendency to vanity, and, dominating merely the surface of his nature, he would actually become a prey to vainglory by the very fact of supposing that he had conquered it; the vice would still secretly influence all his actions, unless he resolutely pursued it, so to say, into the depths of his heart, in order gradually to exterminate it there. It is in the depths of our hearts that we must mortify whatever in us displeases God. This is all the more necessary, because we shall otherwise be satisfied with our outwardly good actions, or with the pious phrases and excellent principles that we have learned and, by dint of frequently repeating them, we have come to consider our own, whereas in reality we have, deep down in our hearts, thoughts, feelings, aims and desires

quite unlike those that we believe ourselves to have. Such self-deception underlies the Pharisaical disposition against which Jesus, otherwise so gentle, spoke most emphatically on every occasion. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; because you are like to whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones and of all filthiness. So you also outwardly indeed appear to men just; but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matth. xxiii, 27, 28).

Jesus forgave the greatest sinners; with touching tenderness He welcomed penitents who, scorned by the proud Jews on account of their sins, cast themselves at His feet, in order to receive from His lips comfort, encouragement and peace. He showed mercy to the thief on the cross; with gentle hand He cured every wound, and sorrow was changed into joy by His grace. . . . Only one curse was uttered by Him, a curse upon those who do not root up evil from the depths of their hearts. Therefore make it your aim to be inwardly mortified; and never be satisfied with yourselves as long as you allow sinful thoughts, desires and passions to rule within you. Remember the words: "In proportion as thou dost violence to thyself, the greater progress wilt thou make" (*Following of Christ*, I, 25, n. 11).

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"He spoke right."—Mark vii, 35.

Our Lord conferred a great benefit upon the man who was deaf and dumb, by opening his ears and loosing the string of his tongue; and the multitude that witnessed the miracle cried out: "He hath done all things well; He hath made both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak."

We may ask whether these people applied their own words to themselves, and recognized what great blessings speech and hearing are to men. They rejoiced that the man who was cured could articulate and pronounce the various sounds and words clearly; but did they consider that it is not enough to have the gift of speech, but that we ought to use that gift properly? Speech is given us by God, but unhappily none of His other benefits are more frequently misused. Men are only too apt to say what is wrong, and disregard our Lord's solemn warning that we shall have to give an account of every idle word. Of all the sins of the tongue, none is commoner than lying. Not only to the deaf and dumb whom Christ healed, did He give power to speak right, but He will give it to us also, if we are faithful to Him, and this power is indispensable to our salvation. Holy Scripture contains many exhortations to truthfulness, and many warnings against lying, besides several instances of the disastrous effects of falsehood. A lie injures no one so much as the person uttering it; it may mislead others, but it most injures the liar himself, for no other sin so quickly destroys a man's character as the vice of lying. It deadens

the soul to all that is sacred and noble, and lays the foundation of a low, mean way of thinking. How can love of God exist in the soul of a liar, who knows that his lies render him absolutely unlike the God of all truth? How can a liar be charitable towards his neighbor, when in his heart and on his lips falsehood and deceit have their abode? Even if a lie does not actually injure one's neighbor, some amount of scorn of the person deceived is always present in the heart of the liar, and thus ridicule and contempt are hidden under an outward semblance of friendship. What an abominable character! When once the habit of lying is firmly rooted in a heart, all its consequences appear one after another; and a cunning, hypocritical, deceitful disposition is formed, which is an obstacle to all better development of character. A liar, as I have said, injures himself; what is his object in telling a lie? As a rule he is trying to avoid some blame or correction, or to secure praise for what he has not done, and for some virtue that he does not possess. If his lie is believed, he escapes the censure that he dreaded, and receives the praise that he sought. But what good does he derive from it? Would it not have been better for him to accept the reproof, and amend his ways, and not to have the praise, but to be spurred on really to deserve it? Truth might have cost him something, but its fruits would have been sweeter than those of a lie.

A liar injures himself by losing the respect of his fellow men. A man must have sunk very low before he ceases to care for this respect; why, then, does he risk the loss of it by telling lies? Who can possibly feel much esteem for a liar? Christian charity may make us, out of compassion for him, conceal the poor opinion that we really have of him, but at the bottom of our hearts we all know that a liar deserves contempt. When we cease to respect a man, we

cease also to trust him, for how can we confide in one whose words may be true or false, we know not which?

If we need advice, the last person to whom we shall apply is a liar, for how can we be sure that he is not telling us to do the exact opposite of what he recognizes as proper? And should the liar himself need counsel, who can give it him? Is it possible to advise a man, who may not have given us all the information requisite to enable us to form an opinion regarding his difficulties? May he not be seeking advice simply in order to ridicule it or make a bad use of it?

In the same way when a liar asks help, we often doubt whether his need is genuine, and thus his lies check the stream of Christian charity. We must acknowledge that nothing is so great a hindrance to progress in this world as lying. The world is corrupt and often laughs at simple honesty and truthfulness, but nevertheless everyone likes to have honest, straightforward people about him. Who would care to have in his house, or to associate with, persons whom he can not trust not to misrepresent all that goes on in his household, and not to rob him and his family of that good reputation that is the best foundation of temporal happiness? We all try to avoid liars, for they often do more harm than thieves, who deprive us only of our goods, whilst liars take away our honor. A liar causes confusion in houses and families, and sows distrust between those who previously had full confidence in one another. He tells one what the other is supposed to have said and done, until he has fanned a flame of discord, where harmony used to reign. Even in society a liar is hated, and when he is found out, everyone shuns him, or, if it is impossible actually to avoid him, we do so mentally, by being on our guard, holding aloof from him and showing so much caution in our dealings with him as to prove our want of

confidence in him. How true are the words of Holy Scripture: "The mouth that belieth, killeth the soul" (Wisd. i, 11). The liar injures himself in time and in eternity; therefore you should resolve firmly always to speak right, always to adhere to the truth and avoid lying, as if it were a serpent, ready to kill whoever touches it. If you are faithful to the truth, you will be faithful to Jesus, who is all Truth, and a heart loyal to Him is fruitful in every kind of virtue, none of which can flourish in a lying soul. The heart of the honest and upright has a claim to the everlasting kingdom of all truth and purity. Amen.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho."—Luke x. 30.

The Fathers of the Church have assigned a mystical interpretation to the parable contained in to-day's Gospel, and regard it as referring to the fall of man and his redemption, as well as to the means whereby we may and ought to participate in the fruits of this redemption. The man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho is Adam, who sinned against God, and whose sin we, as his descendants, have inherited. The name, Jerusalem, is derived from words signifying "the vision of peace," whilst Jericho means "change." By sinning man abandoned Paradise, where he had known God in purity and simplicity of heart, and brought about a change in his state of happiness, physical and mental, that he had enjoyed by the grace of God. In the same way every sin that we commit takes us from Jerusalem to Jericho, from the city of peace into a condition of pitiable change, for a most disastrous change is effected within us when we cease to be God's children and become His enemies, and when, instead of having a right to heaven, we make ourselves worthy of everlasting punishment.

The robbers in the parable represent the devil, who in the form of a serpent tempted our first parents to sin, thus depriving them of many spiritual and corporal advantages. But there are other robbers, whom we ought carefully to avoid: they are all who tempt us to do wrong, they are our own evil thoughts and desires, and Satan himself, who still goes about as a raging lion.

The robbers left the poor traveler helpless. We may say that Adam and Eve in Paradise were helpless after they had sinned, but God, in His infinite mercy, did not reject them forever,

but promised to send them a Redeemer to save them. Whenever men have realized their deep degradation and spiritual misery, they have sought to raise themselves in various ways. Among pagans there have been wise men, who, following the light of their enfeebled reason, have taught many useful lessons, but they were not able to instruct men sufficiently regarding God and His holy will, and still less had they any power to deliver mankind from sin. By means of the Law of Moses, God Himself tried to prepare His people for the spiritual help that was to be given in the future. The Jewish ceremonies and sacrifices were, however, mere types, incapable of doing real good, and efficacious only in as far as they pointed to the coming Redeemer. Hence the priest and the Levite could not help the wounded man. We all know the Good Samaritan; Jesus Himself, who, like a Samaritan, was hated by the Jews. At great cost to Himself He showed His pity for mankind; He bound up our wounds, the wounds inflicted by sin upon our souls, by allowing Himself to be wounded; He poured oil and wine into them, the soothing oil of His infinite mercy, and the wine of His holy Blood, that He shed for our sake, the best and surest pledge of His Divine compassion. He laid the half dead man upon His own breast—and the Fathers see in these words a reference to His own most sacred Body, for He bore the sins of us all, when suffering upon the Cross, as St. Peter says: "In His own self He bore our sins in His body on the tree" (I. Peter ii, 24).

The consideration of Christ, the Good Samaritan, ought always to fill us with love and gratitude towards Him, who wished not that one of us should perish, but that all should obtain eternal life. For Him it was not enough to have redeemed us, but He wished all men in every age and in every part of the world to share in the results of His redemption. Hence He brought the injured

man, *i. e.*, us Christians, to the inn, the holy Catholic Church, in which it is His will that all shall find a shelter; and in this inn there is a host, whose business it is to care for all who by God's infinite grace are brought into the shelter of the Church. It was to this host that Jesus said: "Feed My lambs, feed My sheep," and the innkeeper now is the Pope, our holy Father, the successor of the Prince of the Apostles. The Good Samaritan paid two pence to the innkeeper in order to make provision for the needs of humanity for all time. These two pence represent the two chief powers conferred by Christ upon the Church, viz., the power to teach what is infallibly true, and the power to administer the Sacraments. By means of true doctrine and the graces bestowed in the Sacraments, the Church is intended to promote the salvation of men.

In every detail of the picture drawn by our Lord of the Good Samaritan we can trace an allusion to what He has done for us, and the parable concludes with an impressive lesson to us all, for the Samaritan says: "Whatsoever thou shalt spend over and above, I at my return will repay thee." These words contain a very important instruction for all holding office in the Church. Jesus will come again, and reward them for all their trouble; but before the reward can be given, their merits must be investigated. Many allusions were made by Him on various occasions both to this examination and to His second coming to judge the world. What will He say if, on His return, He finds the sick man, for whom He did so much, dead, and not, as He expected, cured of his injuries? He will certainly call upon those, who should have tended the sufferer, to give a strict account. Sometimes they will be able to plead: "I did my best; I carried out Thy orders and used all means at my disposal, but the sick man refused all my remedies; he was obstinate, and either threw away all that I offered him, or,

in spite of my warnings, applied the remedies in a wrong way. He perished by his own fault, in spite of the loving care of the Good Samaritan, and in spite of the exertions of those, who, obeying the Good Samaritan's orders, have tried to care for him."

Therefore let us make good use of the means of salvation, which Jesus in His grace and mercy has given us. Let us not turn a deaf ear to those who teach us what is right; let us not follow our own devices, but rather the counsel and instruction of those whom Jesus has set over us for our welfare; let us zealously cooperate with the many graces offered us by the holy Catholic Church, so that when the Good Samaritan comes back to judge us, we may all be able to welcome Him with joy. Amen.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"Jesus, answering, said: 'Were not ten made clean? and where are the nine?'"—Luke xvii, 17.

By asking what had become of the nine who did not return to thank Him for curing them, our Lord showed plainly His displeasure at their ingratitude. He has often conferred upon us a spiritual benefit analogous to that which He bestowed upon the ten lepers. At our baptism He cleansed us from the leprosy of sin and although He repeatedly restores to us the grace that we have lost, we do not all return to Him, with real efforts to correct our faults. He seems to say: "I have shown mercy to many, why do they not come back to me? Why do they not even take one step towards Me by trying to do right?" The only possible answer is that many never deny themselves at all, and especially never practise any inward mortification, without which no one can draw near to Christ.

If we wish to be truly mortified, we must wage war incessantly upon the egoism to which we are so prone, and upon every form of selfishness, for this is one great reason why we fall into sin. Even if a man refrains from obviously sinful wishes and desires, he is still restless and disturbed, inclining now in one direction, now in another, as long as he refers all his aims and objects solely to himself. His nature is so undisciplined that he regards as good only what pleases him. If things occur in accordance with his wishes, he is proud and gives way to exaggerated delight; but if his hopes are frustrated, he gives way to excessive sadness, bad temper or even despair. In all these ways does selfishness manifest itself; it often lurks behind specious pretexts and alleges motives

that seem excellent, but in reality a selfish man aims only at the gratification of his own tastes, whereas a truly pious man aims at peace with God. A selfish man complains of everything, a good man sees God's will everywhere. A selfish man has recourse to all possible means, though they may be sinful, of acquiring what he wants; a good man makes use only of such methods as are pleasing to God. A selfish man is always wondering if he feels happy; a good man inquires first of all what will conduce to God's honor and his neighbor's welfare.

An egoist idolizes self; he considers nothing but his own tastes, which guide him in all his actions and stand between him and God, obscuring all that is higher, preventing him from even desiring heaven and thus causing him to be excluded from it. He who seeks nothing but himself will only find evil on his way through life; and even on his deathbed, when it is too late, he will have only himself, and a knowledge of his own heart. It was in this sense that our Lord said: "He that loveth his life shall lose it" (John xii, 25). Is a selfish man happy in this world? He may be successful in all his undertakings and perhaps consider himself happy, but no one with higher thoughts and aspirations would agree with him. One who is completely self-centred, and concerned only with earthly pleasures, loses all taste for what is noble and honorable; in course of time he forgets God altogether and cares for men only in so far as he can use them for his own advantage; he may feel comfortable after his own fashion, but he knows nothing at all of the ardor and enthusiasm inspired by religion and virtue, nor of the sweet, consoling intimacy with God, that raises us far above this world with all its petty triviality. He never rejoices at the prosperity of another, nor sympathizes with his neighbor's sorrows. It happens, however, far more frequently, that an egoist

suffers misery, even on earth, and has no temporal comfort. He strives to gratify desires, and at the moment when he seems to have succeeded they prove worthless. He feels solitary and forsaken, because he does not cling to God, who alone can never deceive or abandon him; he is embittered against God, himself and the world, and suffers from the deception for which he only is to blame. Many an aching heart is tormented by these results of selfishness, and the egoist resembles a madman, who turns his weapons against himself. How many must acknowledge that they would have occupied a different position and led a different life, if, in their egoistic folly, they had not interfered with the wise designs of God, undermined their own happiness and brought misery upon themselves!

We ought to try with all our might to rid ourselves more and more of all self-seeking; and the way in which this may be accomplished is stated very simply but forcibly by Thomas à Kempis (Book I, ch. 3): "He, to whom all things are one, and who referreth all things to one, and seeth all things in one, may be steadfast in heart and abide in God at peace." This then ought to be our aim—to keep in view the one thing for which we live and move and are, namely, God's holy will. All that we do or avoid, all our joys and sorrows, must harmonize with His will, which we ought to see in all things, so that it becomes the guide of our actions, the reward of our exertions, encouragement to suffer and hope of compensation. In this way we shall always be at peace with God. Conformity with His will is, according to Thomas à Kempis, the weapon with which we can overcome selfishness. He does not mean the sort of resignation which, in a defiant though discouraged manner, submits to God's will without cooperating with it, and lets itself be borne along, like an empty boat by the waves; nor

does he mean that false resignation, which manifests itself only in words, and resents the slightest opposition to one's own will, but he refers to the Christian submission that asks at every step: "What does God wish me to do?" and when His will is known, works zealously and unweariedly in union with it, enduring whatever comes day by day, however painful it may be, with uncomplaining patience. Perhaps the most beautiful petition in the "Our Father" is "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." If we really meant this prayer, we could not fail to improve; but it is not enough to express a desire in words—we must show our good resolution in all our actions and in our whole behavior, and then it will be God's will for us to be happy forever in heaven. Amen.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow."—Matth. vi, 28.

Many men who reject the revealed Word of God turn their attention to nature, and maintain that the contemplation of its beauties awakens within them feelings of devotion. This is quite possible, as God speaks to us through all His creatures, but whoever listens only to their voices can never attain to a true knowledge of God. If it were otherwise, no one would know Him better than the savage tribes, who are born under the shade of ancient trees and grow up surrounded by the wonders of nature. It is true that God's voice is heard in nature, but it is easily misunderstood, if no other call is heeded. We see this in the case of the Greeks and Romans, who indeed perceived the presence of a Divine force in the rustling of the leaves, the soughing of the wind, the ripple of the brooks and rivers, as well as in the roar of the waves, but they made the mistake of ascribing each single phenomenon of nature to a distinct deity. The voice that speaks to us through nature is intelligible only if God has previously spoken to us through revelation. This was the case in Paradise, where natural beauties, far surpassing any that we know, appealed to the hearts of our first parents; but all the sweet sights and sounds would have remained unintelligible, had not God Himself, as we read in Holy Scripture, instructed Adam. Whenever, therefore, guided by God's hand and by His holy religion, we go forth into the open country, the voice of nature makes itself clearly heard, and we understand its meaning; it leads us to God, and not away

from Him. This is true, not only when we are walking amidst beautiful scenery, but whenever we examine any natural object, or study the natural sciences, which are really useful only if we are guided by a true recognition of God's power.

In to-day's Gospel we read how Christ told His disciples to look at nature: "Consider the lilies of the field." He did not refer to things necessary for the maintenance of life, such as corn, but He pointed to the lilies, the wild flowers that adorned the meadows. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow." As far as you know they serve only to delight your eyes, and yet God preserves them; small and insignificant as they may be, they are evidence of His infinite love, for He even takes care that their beauty and fragrance shall be a source of joy and refreshment to His children. Let the sight of wild flowers remind you to be grateful to God for His infinite love and kindness. You ought not merely to look at them and be pleased with them, nor gather them only to forget them and throw them away; no, you ought to *consider* them attentively and learn a lesson from them. In obedience to God's will, the tiny plants grow from the seed, and shoot up, putting forth little buds that gradually unfold and become beautiful blossoms. They grow until they have fulfilled the purpose for which they were created. Thus, says our Saviour, should you learn from the lilies of the field to accomplish the task for which you were created. Just as the flowers attain their physical perfection, so ought you to try to attain your spiritual perfection, and constantly advance toward it. God has implanted in you a tendency to struggle upward, and there should be no interruption in your spiritual growth and progress on the way to heaven. This is the lesson to be learned from the lilies of the field and from every tiny flower. We show our gratitude to our merciful God best by conforming to His holy

will. Therefore let us go forward, let us continually rise higher, and then we shall be acting in accordance with His bidding, which makes itself known to believers through the flowers of the field.

Just as the lilies of the field grow without laboring or spinning, so do we grow spiritually by God's grace. Without Him we can do nothing, but by the help of His grace we can accomplish anything. The flowers cling with their roots to the earth, whence God supplies them with nourishment, and we, too, must cling with all our might to His grace, which alone enables us to grow and prosper. We must cooperate with grace, and then we shall continue to advance towards heaven; this fact is revealed to us in the character of that Lily to whom the Church applies the words of Holy Writ: "As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters" (Cant. ii, 2). We all know this beautiful Lily, surpassing all other human beings in purity and goodness; she was addressed by the angel as blessed among women. In comparison with her all others are like thorns, but she alone was always free from even the smallest taint of sin. We all know and honor the name of Mary, and if we think of her, we may assign a second meaning to the words, "Consider the lily," and remember how she grew in grace and in God's favor throughout her whole life. She was full of grace and the Lord was with her, and she merited extraordinary graces by never failing to make good use of all the grace that she received; she co-operated zealously with it, and thereby attained to the glory that she now enjoys in God's garden in heaven. Yes, let us often look at Mary, the Lily beside the throne of God; and whenever we utter or hear her name, let us call to mind that her only aim in life was to grow and increase in virtue and perfection. May her holy name encourage us, too, to do our best to make progress in all that is good; not to stand still, nor to slip back

into lukewarmness and indifference, but to press forward and upward, always advancing on the way to heaven. May the most holy Virgin Mary, the Lily among thorns, obtain us grace to act thus to-day and always. Amen.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."—Gal. v, 25.

The raising of the widow's son at Naim may remind us that we ought to let Christ raise us to a new life in the spirit, and through and with Him we should lead a life pleasing to God. St. Paul teaches us this lesson in to-day's epistle.

If our life is to be truly pious, we must do everything in the spirit of Christ, for whatever is done without that spirit is worthless in God's sight. True piety rejects prayers, ceremonies and exterior practices of devotion if they are devoid of the inward spirit of devotion, humility and obedience; but it retains carefully such exterior devotional practices as are penetrated with the spirit of true piety and earnest striving after virtue, and are calculated to give life and vigor to this interior spirit of religion.

There are, for instance, many acts of mortification that have been practiced by holy men and women in every age, and have helped them to make progress in virtue, and to subjugate their flesh to their spirit. This last is the chief object of all exterior practices of mortification, for, although the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak, and therefore the concupiscence of the flesh must be curbed, and the body brought as far as possible under the dominion of the mind. How could the spirit remain free from sin, if it were not strong enough to subdue the lusts of the flesh.

Works of exterior mortification, besides enabling the spirit to gain dominion over the flesh, help also to foster a spirit of penance, and to obtain many graces from God, provided they are done

for love of Him. As we read in Holy Scripture, wisdom is not found in the land of them that live in delights (Job xxviii, 13). The chief means of outward mortification are solitude, fasting, vigils, and other discomforts, that we impose upon ourselves for love of God. Many of the saints practised all these things, and although it is not permissible for us to follow their example without advice, it is well to know something about them, partly that the attractions of the world may not cause us entirely to neglect or ridicule them, and partly that we may not, through mistaken zeal, regard these merely external penances as constituting true piety, or injure our bodily health without promoting the welfare of our souls. We ought also to know what mortifications it is safe and expedient to practise in our daily life. Many of the saints had recourse to terrible austerities; they fasted, scourged themselves, deprived themselves of sleep, and wore instruments of penance; we hear of some who withdrew into solitary places and lived in caves or in the desert, communing only with God; others fasted so strictly that they seemed to live on Holy Communion alone, whilst others never wearied of spending whole nights in prayer and praise, and of frequently employing instruments of penance.

Very various opinions are expressed with regard to all these austerities, which are condemned by some as absolute folly. Yet our Lord's words, "By their fruits you shall know them," lead us to think otherwise. If the men and women who did these things had displayed obstinacy and selfishness, or had clung to their faults, we should have had to concur in the common opinion and say: "Yes, we may know them by their fruits; all that these people did was folly." But what fruits did they actually produce? We read of the humility and modesty of these ascetics, how they forgot

themselves in their zeal for the good of others, how heroically they resisted the greatest temptations, how by their example and teaching they helped to save thousands, and committed only the trifling faults due to human frailty, and if we then call to mind our Lord's words, "By their fruits you shall know them," we have to acknowledge their spiritual life to have been so glorious that their external mortifications can not possibly have been foolish.

The saints certainly were prompted by God to act as they did, therefore they can not be charged with folly; the charge is more applicable to those who criticize them. It is, however, foolish to imitate them recklessly. Some people in their excessive zeal resolve to practise the austerities of the saints, not perceiving that what was heroic virtue on their part, because they acted in the spirit of obedience to God's special impulse, is in their own case folly, if not actual sin, because it is undertaken without, or even against the will of God. Such people are only too apt to display, as the fruits of their austerities, obstinacy, disguised under a pious exterior—pride and persistence in faults that are manifest to all except themselves. The result of their uncalled for and extraordinary austerities is always folly, if it is nothing worse, but they try to justify it by quoting the examples of the saints. By their eccentricities they attract attention, and yet are plainly full of faults, and consequently the world looks down, not only upon them, but upon the religion that they profess, as if it inculcated such perverse exaggerations. Therefore, all that such people accomplish with their ostensible mortification is to bring discredit upon religion.

That we may avoid making mistakes with regard to external mortification, and find the right path to follow in our own lives, we ought to know the rules under which alone it is right to practise it. The consideration of these rules must be deferred until we

make our next meditation; but let us now renew our resolution to avail ourselves of the little opportunities for mortification that occur every day, and to examine ourselves daily on our fidelity to this practice. Especially let us strive to become more like the saints in virtue, above all in their heroic charity towards God and man, and in their obedience and piety. Amen.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened by His spirit with might unto the inward man."—Eph. iii, 14, 16.

As all outward mortifications are merely means of perfection, and not an end in themselves, they ought to be recommended and employed only in as far as they do not interfere with health, nor with the performance of the ordinary duties of life. Hence we ought to be very cautious in recommending others to practise austerities, and in imitating the things done by others. All mortifications have the same object, viz., to bring us nearer to Christian perfection, but the means employed must necessarily vary according to the age, constitution, character, circumstances and position of each individual. In the same way all medical treatment aims at the restoration of health, but the remedies prescribed vary according to the disease from which the patient is suffering and his physical peculiarities.

How absurd it would be to give to one patient the medicine prescribed for another, and to imagine that a drug which proved beneficial in one case, must be a cure for all sick people, no matter what malady they have! The absurdity of this is plain to everybody, but some of us do not recognize the folly of a similar treatment of the soul, which is of more value than the body.

It does not at all follow, because a confessor orders one man to practise one particular mortification, that another person ought to practise it too; on the contrary, what is beneficial to one may be harmful to another, and therefore we ought not to tell others what

penance has been imposed upon us at our Confession. If we see others practising this or that mortification, it does not follow that we should imitate them. Let us do what is good for us individually, according to our confessor's advice. Imitation in this respect has often done much harm, for, even if the mortifications imitated are not injurious, people are sure to say: "What kind of piety is this, that does this or that simply in order not to be unlike others?" Experience teaches us that those who do things that attract attention, solely from a desire to copy others, are equally ready to copy what is bad. It is my duty to caution you never to put yourselves forward to guide or counsel others with regard to any extraordinary works of mortification. We can not be too zealous in encouraging others to observe the ordinary rules and duties of religion, but we ought to act with extreme care when any question arises of extraordinary works, which can be beneficially undertaken only after a thorough investigation has been made of the circumstances of each person. Some are only too ready to give advice, but it is not easy to acquire both the general knowledge of mankind and the particular knowledge of the individual, which alone can enable anyone to decide whether a work, good in itself, will be useful and advantageous in some particular case. With regard to bodily sickness, we often see that ignorant people, with all the good will in the world, do a great deal of harm by their advice, and precisely the same thing is true with regard to the soul.

All the saints are agreed that, in practising works of exterior mortification, it behooves us to be on our guard against injuring our health and strength. This is a proof that their penances, which would destroy our health or perhaps actually kill us, were performed by them only because God gave them special sanction. On this subject St. Thomas Aquinas writes: "We ought to judge

of the end and of the means conducive to it in different ways; the end (viz., perfection) should be sought unreservedly; but, in applying the means, we must always take into consideration whether they are conducive to the attainment of the end in the case of the person applying them. Hence, continues the saint, it is important to reflect that in the spiritual life the end is perfection; but fasting, vigils and other bodily austerities are only means, and should therefore be applied with reasonable moderation, so as to overcome the passions without injuring the health, as St. Paul tells us, when he says: "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service" (Rom. xii, 1).

St. Jerome says that whoever injured his body immoderately by such exterior mortifications, offered God a sacrifice obtained by violence and robbery. St. Basil expresses a similar opinion when he writes: "Let it be regarded as more honorable and profitable to provide for the preservation and increase of physical strength, than to diminish it by mistaken austerities; let it be thought better to keep the body strong and healthy, so that it may be of service in doing good works, than to exhaust it by excessive mortification." St. Bernard, too, agrees with the saints to whom I have just referred, and gives a reason, derived from sad experience, for carefully avoiding excessive severity in this respect. He says that people who go too far in their blind zeal as a rule grow tired of all the exercises of piety, and either return to a worldly existence, or, under the pretext of wishing to recover their strength, indulge in every imaginable luxury, even in those that are sinful. All excess, even in what appears to be good, leads to a lamentable end.

There is no need for me to prove that our exterior mortification ought no more to interfere with the performance of our ordinary duties than be prejudicial to our health. Our duty is always the

chief thing for us to keep in view, as it is imposed upon us by God, and is the expression of His will. It is by no means right to undertake any voluntary good works that cause us either to neglect our duty, or to discharge it in an imperfect manner; it is in fact absolutely wrong, and an unmistakable token of thoroughly false piety, unless the mistake is due to some mental weakness.

To sum up what I have said to-day: We may be sure that no exterior practices of mortification ought to injure our health or interfere with our duties. Let us be guided by this principle, and we shall then be in no danger of giving way to false piety, for we shall undertake such practices only as are conducive to our true welfare. Amen.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind."—Matth. xxii, 37.

When God commands us to love Him, it is not because He derives any advantage, pleasure or additional honor from our doing so; it is inevitable that a creature must glorify God, but man, who possesses reason, has it in his power to glorify Him voluntarily or involuntarily. If a man turns to God in love and seeks Him in all that he does, thinks or speaks; if he makes God's glory his aim throughout life, rather than his own welfare; if he cares little about possessing other things, and desires chiefly to be intimately united with his Creator, he is glorifying God voluntarily, and this voluntary service is meritorious to himself. If, on the other hand, he is indifferent towards God, making himself and not God the object of all his exertions, if he even goes so far as to cherish feelings of hostility to God and His holy Commandments; if he is lost in self-love or in love of created things so completely as to care nothing at all for God, and, having lost all faith, to idolize himself alone and worship material objects, he must still glorify God, although he does so involuntarily. He can not help glorifying God's wisdom and power that are manifested in man's inability, in spite of all his efforts, to alter the decrees of God. Thus Joseph's brethren glorified God's wisdom, for, when they despised the Lord and His Commandments and sold their brother into slavery, they were actually assisting to carry out God's designs.

Goliath mocked the people of Israel and their God, but he was giving an opportunity to God's loving providence to reveal itself,

and he was overcome and slain by the hand of the youngest and most insignificant among the chosen people. Nabuchodonosor commanded divine honors to be rendered to his statue, but his wickedness only contributed to God's glory, for his real weakness, and the weakness of all who rebel against God, became apparent when he went mad. Those who refuse to love God, can not help contributing to His glory, in spite of their bad will, for in their case His justice is revealed, and after vainly struggling against His will, they are finally overtaken by eternal punishment. It depends, therefore, upon a man's will whether he loves God, and by loving Him glorifies Him and obtains his own salvation; or whether, turning away from God, he glorifies Him by his own weakness and suffering, and finally loses his own soul.

When our Saviour told us that the Commandment requiring us to love God was the first and greatest of all the Commandments, He was aiming at nothing but our good; and to-day's Gospel is a loving admonition to be careful for our own salvation. Why are we often so lukewarm, doing right in a mechanical way, by force of habit, rather than zealously and with real interest in the welfare of our souls? We act in a most contradictory way, for we forget and neglect what is indispensable to our happiness, although there is innate in all our hearts a constant craving after it. The care for our own salvation should be the most important business of our lives, for it affects something infinitely more desirable than all the advantages of this world. If we are really anxious to be saved, we shall seek the love of God, indestructible, unchanging—peace of heart and eternal bliss. Our salvation means our being united with the great, wise, loving God, our knowing Him as He is, in all His infinite grace and mercy, our recognizing in all His works the unfathomable greatness of His power, our loving Him,

as children love their father, though with a far closer and more heartfelt love, having no wishes or cravings apart from this love, but being filled with peace and joy, such as our feeble, perishable hearts now can not contain.

If we think of this glory in God, this intense, ineffable love of Him, is it possible for us not to wish most earnestly to attain to it? Must not every other longing, every dream of earth vanish before it? Are we not drawn irresistibly towards Him who is our All? Can any desire for earthly things make us deaf to the call of this holy love and of eternal happiness?

Man exerts himself to win prosperity in this world, although it is often a mere phantom, so fleeting as to deserve rather to be described as misery. Our only true happiness, our only true joy, truth, clearness of vision and bliss are in heaven. Let this be our aim, let us not cast away our treasure in heaven for the sake of the filth of earth. Yet this simile is most inadequate; for we are speaking of something absolutely indescribable, the possession of God Himself. Can we throw this aside for some fleeting advantage here? No; it is indispensable for us to labor earnestly for our own salvation, in order to secure it. You all know the parable of the five foolish virgins, who, having no oil, went too late to purchase some, and consequently came to the bridegroom's door only to find it closed, and to hear Him say: "I know you not." If now, in the days of our health, whilst we have strength and vigor, we do not trouble to know Jesus and His love, if we have in our hearts no fire of love, no ardent longing to serve God and please Christ, if our good works do not shine with light, how shall we fare at the hour of death, when through our whole being rings the cry: "The Bridegroom cometh"?

Black darkness will prevail within us, for the joys of this world

will no longer charm us as in our time of health; the consolations of the world will leave us cold, and even if we try to persuade ourselves that our illness is not dangerous, we shall still hear the cry: "The Bridegroom cometh." Then we shall look for the lamp that has perhaps long been extinguished; and it may be that with sorrow we shall have to confess: "It burned brightly in my childhood, but gradually I forgot this lamp of Divine love, and now it has gone out and lies neglected in some obscure corner." In our urgent need we may look for it and try to set light to it, but we shall have no oil; the good works that we have failed to do can not then be accomplished. It is possible for the foolish virgins to find mercy at the last hour, but the merit that they failed to secure is gone for ever. Let us be eager *now* to make our salvation sure. Let us set to work quietly, but with determination, and labor at our task by fervent prayer, by faithful fulfilment of our duties, by obedience and by conquering the enemy, who, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour. Do not put off matters until to-morrow, for your enemy who desires your ruin will not postpone his assaults; he is always awake, and will miss no opportunity of destroying you when he finds you off your guard. To-morrow may never come, so do your best to-day to secure your salvation, for perhaps the night is already close at hand, when no man can work. Amen.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"Christ will confirm you unto the end without crime, in the day of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."—I Cor. i, 8.

In addressing these words of comfort to the Corinthians and to us all, St. Paul reminds us that it is our duty throughout life to cooperate with the grace given us. Solitude and retirement help us very much in this cooperation with grace, and, as a rule, the object in view, when any one chooses a solitary life for love of God, is to be free to lift up his heart to God, undisturbed by the distractions and turmoil of the world, and by means of prayer and meditation to live in the presence of God, thus cleansing his soul from the stain of sin, and to remain safe from the dangers that threaten those who live in the world.

Solitude produces noble thoughts, holy feelings and heroic resolutions. In solitude minds that have suffered in their conflict with the world regain their health, and in solitude we learn that true happiness consists in quiet retirement and in humble seclusion, far from the clashing interests and pursuits of busy life. Solitude prepares our hearts to appreciate the pure joys of devotion and love of God, and suggests to us thoughts and opinions of true wisdom. The Son of God frequently withdrew into solitude, and it was on the gloomy slopes of Quarantania, far from human intercourse, that He prepared Himself by fasting and prayer continued during forty days for His public ministry. He fled into solitude when the Jews, carried away by their enthusiasm, wanted to make Him their King; and it was from lonely spots on the Mount of Olives that our Saviour's prayer rose frequently at night to His heavenly Father.

Even in the Old Testament we see men of strong character chosen by God to do great works, gaining in solitude additional strength for the accomplishment of the tasks imposed upon them. We see, too, how, whilst they were alone, the streams of God's grace cleansed, strengthened and enriched their hearts.

Abraham was alone, engaged in prayer, when he received the promise that the ardently desired Messias should be born of his race; Jacob was alone when he beheld the ladder reaching to heaven, which was a pledge of God's protection; David, the shepherd-boy, was alone with his flocks when he was called by God to be anointed king. At the place where the promontory of Mount Carmel juts out into the Mediterranean Sea, Elias and Eliseus sojourned, communing with God, and it was on the seashore, amidst the murmur of the waves, that they obtained power to subdue and overcome the outbursts of human passion. Achab, Jezebel and others, accustomed to see their people subservient to their arbitrary and ruthless commands, trembled at the words uttered by these solitary prophets from Mount Carmel, for with courage derived from solitude they boldly proclaimed what the Lord had made known to them in that solitude. At a much earlier date, when the Hebrew nation was still subject to the tyranny of the Egyptian Pharaos, what mighty king would have dared even to attempt to deliver the oppressed people from their rulers? Yet spiritual force, obtained in solitude, was by God's grace able to accomplish what no external power would have attempted. It was in the solitude of Mount Horeb that Moses beheld the burning bush, and, being thus enlightened with regard to his own high calling, he could encourage the men of his race with hopes of future salvation. The Old Testament abounds in instances of the power possessed by solitude, when consecrated to God, to raise,

strengthen and sanctify the mind of man; and, if we look at the history of the Christian Church, we shall find many examples of saints that show us the advantages of solitude. When persecution broke out in the early Church, many Christians fled into the deserts, learned to love them and remained there, striving to attain to the higher destiny of man, and despising all earthly pleasures.

Fearing to be denounced as a Christian by his brother-in-law, St. Paul, the first hermit, left his home, and, after wandering about in the mountains for a long time, found a cave which at first seemed to afford convenient shelter, but subsequently became his permanent abode. Quite apart, however, from any persecutions, a great impulse was given to the eremitical life by St. Anthony the Hermit, who was born about 252 A. D., at Cana, in Upper Egypt, and, interpreting the Gospel teaching literally, gave all his goods to the poor, and then visited various pious recluses in the desert, striving to imitate the cheerfulness of one, the zeal of another, the faith of a third, and the mortification of a fourth. After spending fifteen years in retirement, striving to acquire Christian virtues and overcoming grievous temptations, he went still further into the desert, to the mountains near the Red Sea, and there he lived for twenty years, visited occasionally by his friends, until at length the fame of his sanctity attracted thither a number of Christians eager to save their souls. They lived in isolated dwellings under his rule, and by God's will they became the origin of an association destined to follow closely our Saviour's example, and to counteract the moral laxity of the age. Strengthened at last by God's grace, which he obtained by his prayers in the wilderness, St. Anthony left his solitary retreat when it was necessary for him to labor for the salvation of his fellow men. He did this in 311, to console and encourage the persecuted Christians, and in 328, to defend the

doctrine of the divinity of Christ against the heretical teaching of the Arians. He died in January 356, by which time similar settlements of recluses had been founded by his friend Aron in Lower Egypt, and his pupil Hilarion in the desert between Gaza and Egypt. His sister presided over the first community of virgins, who withdrew into the desert in order to strive after greater perfection with hearts unsoiled by the world and aiming at God alone.

Apart from these instances of perfect and perpetual solitude, we may regard the glorious purity of heart and true piety of all the saints as the outcome of solitary prayer and silent meditation. Some lived out in the world and withdrew only for an hour now and then into the solitude of their own room, some were surrounded by royal splendor and by the noisy amusements of the world, from which their position forbade them to retire, but still in their hearts they conversed with God, maintaining an inward solitude. These minutes and hours of holy solitude, during which they received and stored up graces, gave them strength to persevere to the end, when, according to St. Paul's promise, they will appear not only blameless, but worthy of the greatest reward at our Lord's coming.

Let us implore these saints to help us to follow their example, and so to live that we too may appear without crime and blameless before our Lord Jesus Christ, when He comes to judge the world. Amen.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"Many are called, but few are chosen."—Matth. xxii, 14.

It may be difficult to obtain admission to the marriage feast in heaven, of which we read in to-day's Gospel, but it is not impossible, if only we have the will to do so. "Peace on earth to men of good will." We may find in these words comfort and encouragement under all circumstances. God's grace influences our will and makes it good, determined to follow out St. Paul's advice to the Philippians (ii, 14), to whom, after assuring them that God will give them grace, he says: "Do ye all things without murmurings and hesitations, that you may be blameless and sincere children of God." It is impossible to describe in what good will consists better than St. Paul does in these words. It is a resolution to do all things without murmuring and hesitation. Readiness, cheerfulness and joy in doing one's duty are not only good and beautiful, but necessary, and they bring their own reward by conferring peace of mind, which is inseparable from them. Good will is the foundation of future happiness. A quiet, calm, cheerful performance of our everyday duties gives us great consolation in all circumstances; it prevents our imagination from giving way to foolish dreams and it gathers up much merit for heaven. As St. Paul tells us, a good will consists, further, in a firm resolution to be blameless. It is always a sad thing when people have to be forced by fear of punishment to do their duty. A merely natural sense of honor ought to make us desire to escape punishment, but this is not what the Apostle means by wishing us to be blameless; we must be so, not in the sight of men, but in that of God, and fear

to offend His justice. Where there is no fear of God there is no good will. Think, therefore, often of God as so just that He frequently punishes men severely even in this world, as the facts of history teach us. What is the use of having great knowledge and abilities if we have incurred His wrath? In the eyes of the world we may have everything conducive to happiness, but He has only to give a sign, and the edifice raised with so much skill and care collapses like a house built of cards. Should we be any better off if He refrained from punishing us here? Would it not be worse to dread His chastisement in the world to come? And may not that world be much closer to us than we suppose?

Good will, according to St. Paul, consists, thirdly, in a resolution to be sincere (*i. e.*, clean, innocent) children of God. Cleanness and innocence of heart are found only where love of God reigns supreme, for this love is the purest motive that we can have for willing and acting. Therefore St. Paul teaches us that *fear* of God alone is not enough, but that it must be combined more or less with true *love* of Him, and, where there is good will, fear will be transformed into love. May God give you this good will in ever increasing abundance, that with earnest love of God you may strive constantly to be worthy to be His children, to be "sincere children of God." This was the wish of the Apostle's loving heart for the community entrusted to his care, and these words, simple as they are, express the highest ideal of every Christian. This piece of advice, far surpassing all the pompous discourses of the world, ought to be impressed upon your hearts, to encourage you to do right and to warn you against evil for your whole life. "That you may be sincere children of God." Well will it be for you if love of God, this pure intention, guides you everywhere and in all things.

Whatever we do for love of God is fraught with merit; we are happy whenever we succeed in doing right for love of Him, and even when we fail we derive comfort from the thought that we at least tried to do something for His sake. This pure intention banishes all self-seeking, envy and all the other passions that make us so unhappy when we act under their influence. A heart guided by so pure an intention is at peace and in union with God. To be a sincere child of God is at once a high dignity, pure joy, heavenly consolation and an anticipation here on earth of the bliss of heaven. How calm and peaceful is the heart of a sincere child of God! Come what may, he looks up to his Father with loving confidence and remains at rest.

His lot in life may be hard and bitter, but a sincere child of God will do his duty and bear his burden, strengthened by the love of God. He may lose all that makes existence pleasant, but he will leave things in God's hand, knowing that, as Christ promised, love will repay a hundredfold all that has been taken away, in fact the comfort afforded by God's love is itself worth more than a hundredfold compensation. May God give you this good will to do all things without murmuring and hesitation, and to be blameless and sincere children of God, always drawing closer to Him.

You must not only pray earnestly for this good will, but do your best to preserve it, and remember that it is not enough to have a good will and to make holy resolutions. It was not without design that St. Paul wrote: "It is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish" (Phil. ii, 13). A good will manifests itself in actions. Begin at once to exert yourselves, and from to-day onward lay aside all that is not in harmony with your good will. Be earnest in your resolutions; if you voluntarily put off carrying out a good resolution even for a minute, that minute is lost for

eternity. If you are tempted to put off doing what you ought, call to mind quickly the solemn fact that your eternal happiness depends upon every minute of your life. Do not only begin to do right, but go on doing it. No will deserves to be called good unless it is firm and constant. What is the use of beginning to-day and stopping to-morrow? Of being full of ardor to-day, and cold and indifferent to-morrow? Of generously despising all difficulties to-day and of shrinking from some trivial obstacle to-morrow? Pray God earnestly to give you the grace of constancy. Life is not a game, but, as Holy Scripture tells us, it is a warfare, and only he that shall persevere unto the end shall be saved (Matth. x, 22). If you accustom yourselves now to be steadfast in little trials, you will be able to withstand the worse conflicts that you will have to undergo later in life, and your triumph will give joy to God and His holy angels. If now you take pains to do your duty without murmuring and hesitation, you will some day perform hard tasks in accordance with God's will. Purity of conscience now will help you to remain pure in future. Begin now to be sincere children of God; it is far easier to continue to be such than to become such in later years, when your hearts may have grown hard.

Take to yourselves the wish that St. Paul expressed to the Philippians, and pray earnestly for its fulfilment, let it be often the subject of your meditation. May it encourage, comfort, uplift, warn and sanctify you. "Do ye all things without murmurings and hesitations, that you may be blameless and sincere children of God." Amen.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"Jesus saith to him: 'Go thy way, thy son liveth.'"—John iv, 50.

In to-day's Gospel Christ is again brought before us as comforting and helping mankind. Just us He restored bodily health to the ruler's son when lying at the point of death, so does He restore the life of grace to souls dead in sin. We owe it to Him that we possess spiritual life, and are pleasing to God, and therefore we ought to dedicate ourselves wholly to His service. As we saw on the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, solitude tends greatly to the preservation of the supernatural life; but it is not solitude in itself that is beneficial; solitude devoid of any intention of pleasing God is actually injurious. We must never forget that, whether we are alone or with others, we always have our own hearts with us; if they are resolute and filled with love of God, we are protected against evil even in the midst of a crowd. If on the other hand our hearts are badly disposed, we shall not avoid sin even in solitude.

Jesus was alone in the wilderness, and even there the tempter dared to assail Him, but sin had no power over Him, because He was always most holy both in solitude and in society. We must not therefore rely upon solitude as a sufficient protection against temptation and sin, for it, like social intercourse, has its own peculiar temptations. We ought to notice this fact, and not plead that we have to live with certain people as an excuse for our sins. He who is not steadfast out in the world, will not be so in solitude. Both in solitude and in the company of others we should give our hearts to God and allow Him to deal with them as He will, and thus alone we shall be safe.

Solitude has, as I have said, its own temptations, and woe to him who is not armed with holy fear of the Lord even when alone. Some of the worst temptations that assail us in solitude are due to our own imagination. A soul dwelling apart from men attends less to realities and keeps its own desires in view without noticing the inevitable limitations set by actual life to these desires. Ordinary companionship with men reminds us incessantly of these limitations, but when we are alone our imagination is apt to break loose from the fetters imposed upon it by real life, and it gives way to dreams that are always foolish and often sinful and fraught with disastrous consequences to solitary souls. By yielding to this temptation we allow our mind to be bewildered with plans incapable of execution; our conscience is, as it were, stifled beneath the luxuriant growth of our imagination, and our will, instead of resolutely seeking what is good and noble, is lulled to rest and inactivity, so that it grows weak and aims no longer at what is holy but at what is pleasant. What will become of a man who goes forth into the world, after allowing himself to be a prey in solitude to his imagination and its foolish dreams? He goes forth perhaps with hopes and aspirations destined never to be fulfilled, for a deep chasm separates his dreams from reality. Believing himself to be misunderstood, he retires into himself and does not try to benefit his neighbor, so that the world, which seems to him so cold, can make no use of him. Let us therefore avoid solitude if we find that it unfits us to withstand the temptations arising from our imagination. Fanciful dreams are far more dangerous than reading or associating with others. Spiritually pious solitude is a source of strength to the soul, but solitude spent in day dreams causes its ruin.

David, a great king and the sweetest singer of God's glory, once

went alone up to the roof of his house; one glance was enough to allow sin to find admission to his heart. The poison might have been cast out at once, if only he had gone down and rejoined his courtiers. Listening to the requests of supplicants, punishing criminals, deliberations for the welfare of his people or even innocent amusements might have dispelled the fleeting fancy, and banished the temptation very quickly. But he chose to remain alone, consenting in private to the evil thoughts; he had recourse to no distraction, and so first he became a slave to the sinful suggestion and then, just king though he was, he murdered his most loyal servant.

Let us never forget instances such as this and avoid solitude as much as possible whenever a foul thought takes possession of us, or when being alone gives encouragement to our passions. Many are the sins due to solitude. Out in the world, in the company of other people, false suspicions, envy and hatred often die a natural death, but they assume vast proportions when fostered by fancy and vain-glory in solitary retirement. Our habits of obstinacy and disobedience are often corrected by the circumstances of ordinary life, but he who sits brooding alone is apt to persuade himself that he is in the right.

Let us then learn this practical lesson: Solitude is most beneficial when we withdraw into it in a Christian spirit and for love of God, and spend our time in prayer and meditation; it is, however, harmful if no call of piety, but our own foolish dreams and fancies make us seek it. When the latter is the case, we should avoid being alone, and make it a duty to find distraction in the company of others, for speedy flight, without a moment's delay, is the only means of escape from the dangers of this kind of solitude. Amen.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"Be strengthened in the Lord and in the might of His power."—Ephes. vi, 10.

To-day's Gospel reveals to us the heavy punishment which God in His justice will inflict upon impenitent sinners, for we read that the servant was given over by his master to the tortures, until he should pay his debt in full, and this debt was so enormous that its payment was impossible.

We have great need of strength to avoid incurring such a penalty, and we can obtain it only from God. As St. Paul teaches us in the epistle, we must be strengthened in the Lord and in the might of His power. Our strength is mere weakness, and if we rely upon it we shall perish; therefore it behooves us to do our utmost to become worthy to receive strength from God. One of the best means of obtaining it is Christian solitude.

Of course I am not now referring to the sort of solitude in which the hermits lived, who, aiming at great perfection, withdrew altogether from the world and spent their whole life in absolute seclusion, dedicating their time completely to the service of God. Very few are called to such an existence, and it would be harmful for anyone not having a special vocation to retire into solitude of this kind. Our work lies out in the world, in the company of our fellow men, and our vocation is to do good wherever and whenever we can. Yet we ought not to lose all taste for Christian solitude, nor fail to practise it. Quite apart from the absolute solitude of the hermits there are three other kinds, which are not only possible, but even necessary to people living in the world.

The first kind of solitude possible to them consists in the avoid-

ance of superfluous and useless intercourse with others, and as such we may describe any intercourse not required by our social position, the claims of politeness and charity, or our own legitimate need of recreation. All that can be said with reference to the avoidance of superfluous intercourse with others is stated with admirable simplicity by Thomas à Kempis, and any one who is tempted to excessive indulgence in social distractions ought seriously to take his words to heart. He is addressing religious, but we need only substitute "room" for "cell," and then what he says becomes most suitable and profitable to us all. He writes in the Following of Christ (I, 20): "It is easier to keep retired at home than to be enough upon one's guard abroad. He, therefore, who aims at inward and spiritual things, must with Jesus turn aside from the crowd. . . . If thou wouldst feel compunction to thy very heart, enter into thy chamber and shut out the tumult of the world; as it is written: '*Be sorry in your beds*' (Ps. iv. 5). Thou wilt find in thy cell what thou wilt too often lose abroad. . . . In silence and in quiet the devout soul maketh progress and learneth the hidden things of Scripture."

Well will it be for you if you accept this truth, and do not have with bitter sorrow to acknowledge that the concluding words of the same chapter are applicable to you: "Leave vain things to vain people; look thou to those things which God hath commanded thee. Shut thy door upon thee, and call unto thee Jesus, thy beloved; stay with Him in thy cell, for nowhere else shalt thou find so great peace. If thou hadst never left it, nor hearkened to any rumors, thou wouldst have remained longer in happy peace. But the moment thou delightest to give ear to what is new, thou must suffer thenceforth disquietude of heart."

The second kind of solitude possible to all consists in withdraw-

ing at definite times from society and the temporal business of life, in order to examine our conscience, to cleanse our souls by contrition, and to renew our spiritual energy by means of prayer and meditation. This is what our Lord did in the wilderness and also at the close of each day's work during His public ministry, and He taught the Apostles to adopt the same practice. When they returned from their first missionary journey and told Him all that they had done, He said to them: "Come apart into a desert place and rest a little" (Mark vi, 31), and they went to a lonely spot near Bethsaida, where, associating only with their Divine Master, they found in prayer and meditation strength to undertake further labors.

What is the consequence of concerning ourselves always exclusively with our exterior duties, and remaining in constant intercourse with the world, without occasionally devoting a few days, or at least a few hours, to the welfare of our souls? We are very likely to pay no attention at all to our faults, and gradually to slip unawares into greater sins. Therefore it is most beneficial to withdraw from time to time and to shut out all worldly matters and devote a little while, if only an hour, to things connected with our own salvation.

The third and best kind of solitude possible to those living in the world is that of the heart. It consists in a silent uplifting of the heart to God, undisturbed by the din of life, and unnoticed by those around us. Amidst all his worldly business and distractions a Christian can withdraw, as it were, into the privacy of his own heart, in order to commune with God. Whoever accustoms himself to do this is preserved from many temptations and strengthened in good works. Sorrows and labor may weigh heavily upon him, but inwardly he prays for strength to bear them. He may be in

the midst of noisy distractions, but inwardly he implores grace not to forget God, the Giver of all that he enjoys. Others may suggest mean principles to him, but in his heart he begs to be strengthened in the faith. Thus outward temptations lead him to pray for help, and outward persecutions make him offer himself as a willing sacrifice.

If only we withdrew frequently into this solitude of the heart, in order to look up at God, to ask Him for strength, to renew a good resolution in His sight, to make an act of contrition for sin as soon as it is committed, or to offer up a good work to Him, we should never be at a loss for strength and consolation, and we should enjoy the inward peace resulting from true progress in virtue.

Solitude of the heart is preferable to all kinds of external solitude, although no one succeeds in practising it who does not often withdraw into some sort of retirement. It is the essence of all solitude and has rightly been called the secret of all virtue and perfection.

You will lead a good life if you always and everywhere keep God in your hearts, so as to look up to and pray to Him, whilst renewing your good resolutions. Most earnestly do I desire you to aim at this sort of solitude, and to find out the comfort to be derived from it. May you receive the blessing promised by Christ when, referring to this dwelling with God in the seclusion of one's heart, He said: "If any one love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and will make our abode with him" (John xiv, 23). Amen.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"Render to God the things that are God's."—Matth. xxii, 21.

God requires us to give Him our whole hearts, because they belong to Him; if we keep anything back, we are deceiving ourselves and forfeiting many graces. How much vexation and sorrow should we avoid if we centred all our wishes and inclinations upon God, neither loving nor aiming at anything but what He ordains, and making it our delight to do His will! The secret recesses of our hearts, that we reserve for ourselves, are the lurking-places of discontent, which embitters our whole existence.

Let us put ourselves absolutely in God's hands, and then we shall find true happiness. Christian self-denial is the first step toward this complete surrender to the will of God, and one of the commonest forms of mortification is fasting, of which I propose to speak to-day.

How can and must we practise fasting so as to make it pleasing to God? It is very important to answer this question correctly. We know that many of the saints fasted very strictly, and although we are not required to follow precisely the same rules and to act exactly as they did, we ought nevertheless to imitate them as far as our circumstances allow, and to be animated by the same spirit. What then is the spirit in which Christians should fast?

1. They must have the intention of strengthening themselves, so as to conquer their animal appetites. If the spirit can not subdue the passions, how can it remain free from sins?

2. They must aim at enabling the spirit to soar more readily to

the supernatural. St. John Chrysostom says: "Ships that are light sail quickly across the sea, but those that are overladen are apt to sink; and in the same way fasting, by making the spirit lighter, enables it to traverse the sea of life with greater ease, since it considers only what is of heaven, and pays but little attention to the things of this present life."

3. Fasting is an excellent form of penance, by means of which we can punish ourselves for sin, which generally is committed through yielding to our passions.

The spirit, therefore, in which fasting is practised, should be one of penance, self-conquest and a desire of true perfection. To strengthen the mind rather than to weaken the body is the object of fasting, and to fast in a manner likely to undermine our health would result in defeating our own purpose. St. Francis of Sales warns us against making any mistake in this respect and says: "Two reasons deprive stags of their power of running; if their pasture is rich, they grow too fat, and if it is scanty they are too thin to run." The saint goes on to explain that we are exposed to temptations chiefly when our bodies are too well nourished and when they are excessively exhausted; too much food makes us arrogant and self-indulgent, whilst too little renders us gloomy and cowardly.

We may say of fasting, as of all kinds of exterior mortification, if practised in a wilful and imprudent manner, that, when it is carried to excess, it causes precisely what it aims at averting, viz., temptation. The degree in which each individual should fast must necessarily be decided by his position and circumstances. If a person can not fast much, let him fast little, but with the right intention; he will accomplish more and earn more merit in this way

than he would do by fasting a great deal without the proper intention.

St. Jerome, eminent both by his teaching and his example, says: "What is the use of reducing the body by fasting, if the soul is puffed up with pride? Shall we deserve praise for having cheeks pale with fasting, if meanwhile the pallor of envy disfigures our souls? Can there be any virtue in never drinking wine, whilst our souls are intoxicated with anger and hatred?"

Let us try to acquire the spirit that guided the saints in their practices of exterior mortification and in their efforts to refrain from sin. It is God's will that their extraordinary forms of exterior mortification should clearly reveal this spirit to us; this is the lesson He desires us to learn from them. We can not and must not fast as many of the saints did, but we can follow their example, in accordance with the rules of holy Church, by conscientiously observing the fasts of the Church, unless prevented by some just cause. In this respect the world is far from conscientious, and this fact gives us an opportunity to practise a little humility and to endure a little ridicule for the sake of Christ. People are enthusiastic in their admiration of the steadfastness with which the martyrs of old bore the mocking taunts of His enemies, and yet a single word of ridicule is enough sometimes to make us transgress the commandments of the Church! How weak we are! How would such cowards be likely to behave in face of more violent temptations?

It is an absolute duty to observe the fasts of the Church, but everyone can voluntarily accustom himself to fasting, if he is careful at all times to be strictly moderate in eating, and limits himself to what is necessary. He will not be able to accomplish this without many a struggle regarding food and drink, things apparently

trifling, but really of great importance. Let him, for instance, eat only at mealtimes, and take nothing between meals; let him not hanker after choice and dainty dishes. A taste for such things is often regarded as a mark of refinement, whereas it is really a proof of coarseness and self-indulgence. The true spirit of fasting forbids our ever eating greedily; we should partake with the right intention of what is set before us, and this intention is to strengthen the body to work and perform its various functions, not merely to satisfy our greedy appetite. Therefore St. Bernard advises us, when more abundant food is offered us, to take somewhat less than we should like (if we can do so without attracting notice), and thus to make a sacrifice to God.

Voluntarily to refuse some little dainty, especially if it is very much to our taste, is a form of fasting that is always possible and profitable; because others will probably not see what we are doing, we run no risk of vanity or needless display, and at the same time it often requires great strength of mind to conquer oneself in things apparently so insignificant.

Finally, in everyday life opportunities often occur unsought of practising the spirit of fasting. It may happen that we are prevented from having our meals at the usual hour, or that some dish is distasteful to us. What would be the use of imposing voluntary fasts upon ourselves if in such circumstances we give way to irritability or bad temper?

It is quite certain that a man, who observes no self-imposed fasts, but is easily satisfied, and neither gluttonous nor dainty, displays far more real piety and self-control than one who fasts on certain days of his own accord, but at other times insists upon having everything to suit his own taste, and can not dispense with anything without showing bad temper and falling into sin.

Let us always follow the advice given on this subject by St. Francis of Sales, for as we have seen, he tells us exactly how we can best practise the spirit of fasting in everyday life.

I think we ought to be guided by the words which our Divine Redeemer addressed to His disciples: "Eat such things as are set before you" (Luke x, 8). Let us carry out this precept by regarding it as a matter of indifference what we eat and drink. Amen.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"The girl is not dead, but sleepeth."—Matth. ix, 24.

Death is compared with sleep, for we do not altogether perish when we die, and even our mortal bodies are destined to rise again. We ought not to be afraid therefore of death, since the thought of the resurrection affords consolation in suffering to us no less than to Job, who said: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and I shall be clothed again with my skin and in my flesh I shall see my God" (Job xix, 25, 26). What does it matter if we have trouble now, when we are promised something so glorious as the sight of God in the future? How ungrateful we should be if we murmured against God for giving us an opportunity of earning, by our sorrow here, the joy of resurrection in heaven! How foolish to desire to enjoy now the happiness that we ought to merit here and enjoy hereafter! If you have to bear any pain, remember the day when you will rise in glory from the grave, and do not give way to cowardice, despondency, discontent or murmuring against God. Ask yourselves whether what makes you unhappy or discontented is really so unendurable as it appears. Is not our misery in many cases the outcome of our imagination? Do we not call up pictures of a state of happiness such as never has existed and never will exist? Do not these fancies dazzle our understanding, and would it not be much better and more reasonable to face the truth and look forward to the day when we shall rise again, bearing the palm of victory won by the conquest of sin and of our own follies and passions? This will be our reward for all that we suffer now in

submission to God's will. Let us stand firm now, for some day God will call us also to arise. The same word "Arise" should ring in our ears at the present time: "Arise from the death of sin." God in His mercy speaks thus; we have grievously offended Him, but still He calls us: "Arise, you have but to will, and My grace shall assist you."

Arise, therefore, open your eyes to the truth; look at God and His holy Commandments; by His grace you can judge rightly of the world and perceive that your own imagination and the suggestions of mistaken friends cannot show you the truth. However much you may complain of the world, you can not alter it; your discouragement and annoyance will only prevent you from using it to work out your salvation, and so you will forfeit eternal happiness, and your lamentations, irritability and gloom will make you a burden to yourselves and others. Arise, open your eyes to the light of truth, and see what the world really is, and what you have to do in it to secure your salvation. If you obey God's call to arise, you will not only perceive the light of truth, but you will hereafter see God as He is.

"I say unto thee, arise." Stand up and advance along the right path, from which you have so often gone astray. Acknowledge that you have hitherto been on the wrong road that leads to spiritual death. Do not say: "I am misunderstood; those who tell me my faults are unkind." Jesus is calling you to the right path, the path that leads to heaven, and, although it may be steep and rough, it is not too difficult for you to tread.

Have you not always a guide at hand? Let yourselves be led by Him, for His mercy and kindness never failed. The longer we walk on an ordinary road, the more weary do we become; but the further we advance under His guidance, the greater will be our

strength. If hitherto you have not felt strong enough to go forward, the fault was your own, for you were not holding fast to our Saviour's hand. Many people say: "Why should I follow such a wearisome road and renounce the pleasures offered by sin and the world? What advantage is it to be led by Jesus? The world offers us joy and happiness, and we often see those who serve God suffering most." St. John answers this question in the Apocalypse, (xx, 11, 12): "I saw a great white throne and One sitting upon it, from whose face the earth and heaven fled away . . . and I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne, and the books were opened . . . and the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books." If in this life you have been guided by Jesus, on the day of resurrection you will at once recognize the One sitting upon the great white throne; you will know Him to be your dearest Friend, and will behold Him with joy.

Whither does Jesus lead us? Not to happiness in this world, it is true, but to Himself, the unfailing source of bliss. Therefore I bid you arise. Stand up and live and work; labor and be not weary. Jesus is calling you now by His grace. Life should be full of action and energy, for inactivity brings death, or rather inactivity *is* death. Be zealous, therefore, in doing the work assigned to you by God. Work; not like machines, devoid of life, which move only when driven by some external force that is not their own. Pray, then, and work; not as a fool labors, merely to secure the necessaries of existence, for this is not a spiritual or Christian aim. Work for love of Him who has given you life through Christ, and who, by making you a Christian, is calling you to live as a Christian should. The spirit of Christ is present only where there is love of God. When you are tempted to regard some task as utterly distasteful

and your duty as unendurable, say to yourselves: "Inactivity leads to death; is it possible to merit life by death of this kind?"

Make it your habit conscientiously to perform every duty. When young people are indolent, they have no love of work in later life, and fall into many sins, but by industry in youth they make it possible for them to work in subsequent years and form a habit which will prevent them from ever being idle, and will help them to do much good. Jesus calls you to arise and labor zealously, and supplies you with the grace that you need. Obey His voice and take Him as your model whilst you go about your daily work. You will be sowing a little seed whence your palm of victory will have grown by the day of your resurrection. We shall rise again with the bodies that here on earth have served to lay the foundation of our eternal joy or misery. Let us never forget the resurrection. St. Jerome is represented listening for the last trumpet, because he says: "Whether I eat or drink, whether I am asleep or awake, always and everywhere I seem to hear the terrible sound of that trumpet, which will summon the dead to rise and come to judgment."

May the sound of that trumpet be heard in your hearts, especially when you are tempted to listen to the voice of bad temper, discontent or grumbling. When the pleasures and principles of the world appeal to your soul, open your ears to that sound; and if ever indolence lulls you into the slumber of death, let that trumpet ring through your hearts, for it will spur you on to labor steadfastly and without discouragement. Amen.

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PEPPERT, F.
AUTHOR
Short Sermons on Gospels
TITLE
DATE LOANED
BORROWER'S NAME
E. Morales
9215